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たかやKi
ありふれた職業で
ARIFURETA SHOKUGYOU DE SEKAISAIKYOU
世界最強
OVERLAP

Arifureta Shokugyou de Sekai Saikyou - Volume 03

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Prologue

Hatayama Aiko, 25 years old. History teacher.

As a teacher, she taught specialized knowledge to the students and tried to improve their academic performance. She was not someone who only gave guidance but served as an example. Such things were a serious matter for her, and so, she was an “ally.” There were many who thought the most of her. To put it concretely, she was the adult the children could depend on outside their families.

This was influenced by a large event when she was a student, but that is a separate issue. Regardless, as an ally of the students outside their homes, Aiko’s pride as a teacher was a pillar of support that helped her retain her identity as a teacher.

Naturally, Aiko was extremely dissatisfied by their current situation. They were suddenly summoned to another world and arbitrarily forced into a fantasy situation. The student with the greatest charisma in the class spoke in her place; by the time she had gotten herself together, her precious students were preparing for war.

No matter how she tried to persuade them, the “flow” had been decided and easily swept away her opinions. She was unable to stop them in the end.

At least, I’ll protect my students! She was determined to do so, but, with her rare abilities, she was most useful outside of combat (she was utilized for improving and developing farmland.) Though she desperately tried to oppose the higher ups, she was persuaded by her students. Aiko herself was unable to reject the argument of having the right person in the right place.

She spent every day anxiously thinking about her students who were fighting beyond her reach. Guarded by temple knights of the Saint Church and royal guard of Hairihi Kingdom, she visited every farming village and undeveloped area. However, when she finally completed her work and returned to the Royal Palace, what awaited

her was news of a certain student's death.

At that time, Aiko had blamed herself repeatedly for being unable to force herself to stay with them. 「I'm just getting carried away, thinking myself an ideal teacher, aren't I!?」

Certainly, Aiko was lost since she was unsure anything would have changed, even with her there. Even so, this incident struck Hatayama Aiko as a teacher. It awakened her.

The Church and the Kingdom still wished for the students who were unable to stand up because of their overwhelming fear of "death" to continue with their war preparations.

Aiko thought, 「There's no way I'll let this happen a second time!」 and she stood to oppose the Church and nobles of the Kingdom. Using her position and abilities as a shield, she shouted, don't come near my students! and cornered them.

She somehow managed to gain victory. The pressure to fight decreased.

But their hearts wavered because of Aiko's persistence. Furthermore, her popularity only grew further. The Hero Party aside which dove back into 【Orcus Great Labyrinth】again, ironically, her actions seemed to spur some students into escorting her in her duties as she ran all over the place.

Of course, the students were not fighting "for Aiko" alone; fighting for the classmate who disappeared into the Abyss, thinking about those still fighting desperately in 【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】 shaking off their guilt and frustration for staying in safety, getting rid of the trauma that death had planted in them, there were many reasons for them to stand up; there was no reason to believe Aiko alone drove their behavior.

Aiko could sympathize with them and w as simply happy that they were standing up on their own, no longer shutting themselves away in the Royal Palace while desperately turning their eyes away from reality.

Still, she resisted them encountering danger. 「There's no need for you to fight, 」and 「The knights are escorting me, so I'll be fine, 」she said to persuade them, trying to make them give up, but…

The students warded her words off saying 「Ai-chan is ours! 」and grew more motivated, completely making her actions counterproductive.

After that, she was overwhelmed. They ended up following her as she reformed land. 「I got caught in their pace again. I'm such a bad teacher… 」she said while on all fours.

Though the dedicated knights escorting Aiko assisted her in persuading the students, it became a situation where the students stubbornly refused to back down.

「As if we can leave Ai- chan to people we don't know! 」 The students' sense of crisis was directed not at thieves or demons but the knights. The reason was because all the knights were good looking guys. This was the higher ups' strategy to tie Aiko's talent to the Kingdom and Church. In short, it was a honey trap. One of the students noticed it and informed the others. As such, the 「Protect Ai-chan from Good Looking Military Men Corps 」was formed.

Still, there was a small miscalculation the students made. The so-called hunter became the hunted. The knights tried to persuade the students.

Commander of the temple knights, David, said,

「There is no need to worry. I'll protect Aiko. I won't let her get even a scratch. Aiko is… my everything. 」

Vice Commander of the temple knights, Chase, said,

「For her sake, I will throw away even my beliefs. I will dedicate everything to Aiko. Don't you feel relieved with this?」

Royal Knight Chris said,

「It was my destiny to meet Aiko-chan. Do you think I'd let my destined person die?」

Royal Knight Jade, said,

「… I swore to risk my life. Not as a knight, but as a man.」 This time, the students thought, 「What on earth happened!?

They all had a change of heart!」

In other words, they thought Aiko would fall into the honey trap, but it was the opposite. Either way, they shouted 「As if we can leave Ai-chan to people we don't know!」 like parents who did not want to part from Aiko's side.

As for what happened between Aiko and her escort… that story will be omitted, but Aiko's idle nature and inborn diligence was a gap, and, coupled with her sincerity which spread about her, they had already became Aiko's followers. Many things happened, many things.

With that said, currently, the students were divided into Kouki's group, which continued training inside 【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】 the group which stayed behind, and the group which acted as Aiko's bodyguard.

With this, the 「Protect Ai-chan from Good Looking Military Men

Corps」was formed with Sonobe Yuuka as the leader, followed by her friends Miyazaki Nana and Sugawara Taeko, as well as Tamai Atsushi, Aikawa Noboru, Kawahara Akira, and Yukitoshi Shimizu; each of these seven had trauma in one way or another.

It was a little over 2 months since the Emperor visited Hairihi Kingdom.

They had now left the Capital and were heading to improve land at【Lake Town Ul.】Gatan goton, they felt the vibrations as the horse pulled the carriage without suspension; for children of the present age Earth, the impact hit them deep inside.

「Aiko, are you tired? There's no need to hold back, you know. We'll take a break immediately, okay?」

「No, I'm fine, David-san. Rather, we just took a break a while ago, right? I'm not that weak.」

Within the suspiciously spacious carriage, the commander of Aiko's bodyguards, David, spoke in worry. Aiko's response was mixed with a wry smile.

「Fu fu, Commander just can't stop worrying about Aiko-san. You were exhausted after just a day of travel a while back… I'm also worried. Make sure you don't hold back, got it?」

「I'm sorry for the inconvenience back then. It was the first time I

had traveled by carriage… but I'm used to it now. Thank you for your concern, Chase-san.」

At first, Aiko displayed disgraceful behavior because she was not accustomed to how a carriage moved. She blushed as she recalled the past and thanked the vice commander, Chase.

Seeing Aiko blush, Chase covered his mouth with his hand in agony and tried to casually take her hand… only to be stopped with a cough and a sharp gaze.

The one who stopped him was Sonobe Yuuka who sat diagonally in front of Aiko.

This carriage was prepared for the exclusive use of the students, the "Apostles of God" when they were summoned from the other world, but it was somehow it had been decided that Aiko would have use of it when she was assigned all the handsome soldiers, able to use it as a private room.

Yuuka was a girl with semi-long hair which was dyed a light nut-brown color; she had sharp and beautiful facial features. There were no particular defects when she was in Japan save one, though it was serious. She was a girl with an odd sense of fashion which made her easily misunderstood despite her relatively refreshing character. Currently, a wrinkle found itself on her forehead as she crossed her arms and legs… it was powerful. At the very least, it was to the extent that Atsushi instinctively averted his gaze.

Currently, there were eight people inside the carriage. Outside were

knights on the scale of a platoon though they had held back. It was already too late to verbally respond with only the commander and vice commander being allowed to ride the carriage. The good looking men had tried to give some excuse to get into the carriage with Aiko; they did not want to be separated from her.

「My my, you're staring at me. Won't it spoil your cute face to have so many wrinkles on your forehead?」

Chase gave a pretty-boy smile. It was an attractive smile which would make a normal woman blush, but Yuuka clearly had a reaction which showed she wanted to spit on him even now.

「It's not just Ai-chan Sensei, you call other women "cute," too? Ai-chan Sensei, this man is definitely a player. Please be careful, okay?」

Yuuka muttered these words in a small counteroffensive. A man capable of saying a woman was cute in front of the woman he fell in love with was useless. Furthermore, despite understanding that the students knew this was a honey trap, he dared to use speech and behavior taking advantage of his appearance. In Yuuka's eyes, this man was simply a worthless pick-up guy in a tin can.

「S, Sonobe-san, please don't be like that. Also, you're finally calling me "Sensei," but you still call me "Ai-chan." Can't you just use Aiko-sensei?」

「That won't do, Ai-chan Sensei. Nothing else will do. That's how the students feel.」

「Wh, what's with that, I can't understand it at all. And all the students think that? Is that the way your generation thinks? I need to work hard, this is a trial for my dignity as a teacher! I must understand how my students think at all costs!」

With Ai-chan Sensei telling herself, 「Fight!」 as well as Yuuka and Chase's awkward interactions, the carriage had a warm atmosphere.

This was the reason Aiko was called “Ai-chan,” but she herself never noticed. Her road to becoming a dignified teacher was a long one.

They traveled in the carriage for 4 days after this event.

The pretty boy military men tried to approach Aiko, but Aiko thought everything they said was for the sake of their employers and simply ignored it. Aiko did not notice that they had truly fallen for her. With the students glaring at them whenever they tried to seduce her more than necessary, there was often a heavy atmosphere, but it soon changed into a warm one because of how Aiko acted… This cycle repeated itself many times until they reached Lake Town, Ul.

After recovering from their travel fatigue, they began to survey the surrounding farmlands so they could plan how they would improve the region. Though there were many love comedy events with Aiko at the center… that, too, is a separate tale.

Finally, they began to reform the farmlands. Aiko had even received the nickname of “Goddess of Fertility” which quickly spread throughout Ul. Then, another incident occurred which pressed on Aiko’s mind — one of her students disappeared.

Aiko made efforts. All for her important students.

However, what awaited her now was a powerful reunion and an undesirable outcome.

Chapter 1

「Fu fu, I'll see everything today!」

The crescent moon, occasionally hiding beneath the clouds, illuminated the darkness of the night. Its light appeared with the wind, like a face peering out from the shadows. The light shined on a certain building. To be more specific, a rope was hanging down from the roof, and the light focused on a girl who descended, as magnificent as a member of the special forces.

Suru, suru, she looked below from above the window of the third floor, hanging upside down.

「For Crystabel-san's sake, I will find out what criminal acts you're up to! You wouldn't think I'd come here, now would you, ku ku ku. Now, what kind of abnormal play are you into, I'll definitely find out!」

Haa, haa, Sona- chan was clearly getting excited as her eyes peeked into a room of "Masaka Inn" in Brook. She was a hard worker, bright, and was cute like a flower blooming in the fields, even if she was not the most beautiful. There were quite a number of single men aiming for her in the town.

Currently, she was making good use of all her skills to "peep" on a certain guest's room. Her expression would easily disillusion every man who was in love with her… She was clearly like a perverted old man.

「Kuu, It's too dark, I can't see anything. Maybe if I change my

angle a bit… 」

「 Like this? 」

「 Yeah, yeah, this angle… But it's quiet, isn't it? I thought their voices would be a bit louder… 」

「 Maybe they're using magic to insulate the sound? 」

「 Ha!? They could play that hand! Kuu, crafty! But I won't give up, not until I see it with my own eyes… 」

I will repeat this again. She was outside a window leading into the third floor. Sona could not possibly hear a voice so closely. Sona sweat profusely; gi gi gi, she made an awkward movement, as if she were a machine which was not oiled. There…

Hajime was standing up in the air with a chilly smile.

「 N, no? Customer. Um, this, right! This is one of our hotel's regular services! 」

「 Hmm～ In the middle of the night? 」

「 R, right～ You know, I'm just fixing things up at night so it's not so loud during the day. The hotel's pretty old, right? 」

「 I see, so your reputation is that important? 」 「 Y, yeah, yeah! Our reputation is important! 」

「 By the way, what would happen if there were a rumor that a

spirit came out at night, peeping at others? 」

「Th that would be serious! Rather, it can't be allowed, right? 」
「Right. Exactly. We can't allow peeping, can we? 」

「Y, yeah, that's right… 」

「Ha ha ha 」 「Fu fu fu, 」 Hajime and Sona looked at each other, laughing together. However, Hajime's eyes were not laughing;

by contrast, Sona was trembling and sweating. 「Die. 」

「Hii～～ I'm sorry～. 」

Hajime's face suddenly became serious while he gripped Sona's face with an iron claw. Meri meri, Hajime's fingers made that sound as he tightened his grip.

Sona screamed while struggling in the air, begging for his forgiveness in a panic. Sona was a normal girl, so Hajime was using just enough power to act as punishment. For a first offender, he would be a little more discrete; however, since the day after they returned from Raisen Great Labyrinth, night after night, she used any means possible to peep; his willingness to act discretely had thinned out. By the way, the reason they stayed at the hotel was because their dishes were delicious.

Biku biku, seeing Sona make that sound, Hajime looked away and sighed. Sona let out a breath of relief as he gradually released her; however, she suddenly saw… a demon. This demon, who smiled with his entire face though it did not reach his eyes was Hajime.

「Hii!!」

Sona noticed. His hand was held upward, like a devil slowly beckoning her to hell.

「This time, I'll need to spank you 100 times.」「Noooo～～!」

Sona was handed over to her mother and returned to her bed; he fell down in exhaustion.

「…Good work.」「Welcome back.」

Of course, the voices calling out to Hajime belonged to Yue and Shea. With only the moonlight illuminating the room, the two were just barely visible.

The girl sitting far on the bed was Yue while Shea was closer by. The two were indescribably enchanting in their nightdresses. The beautiful faces of the two who awaited him was like a painting that second-class critics could only describe as a masterpiece.

「Yeah. But what's driving that girl… Is it normal to calmly climb down from the rooftop? If it weren't for the great meals here, I would look for another place.」

Looking at Hajime who spoke in amazement, Shea rose from the bed and laughed as she sat next to Hajime. Yue, too, readily moved and placed Hajime's head on her knees.

「I'm sure our relationship has gotten Sona-chan quite worked up. I'm sure she's anxious. Cute, isn't it?」

「… But that girl's really getting clever… It's worrisome.」

「Yesterday, she made a snorkel on her own and sat in the bottom of the bathtub. It was funny to see her when they found her in the water.」

「Yeah, it's true, as the daughter of the hotel owner, it's bad… But it seems she's only doing this to us…」

While chatting about Sona's eccentric behavior, Shea quietly drew her body to Hajime. Her hands naturally overlapped with his and guided them to her bosom. Shea was flushed, nervous about what would happen next.

Hajime quietly clasped Shea's hands in return. Pikun, Shea's body reacted as she gladly accepted the strength he returned. Hajime continued putting more strength in.

Kyuu… Pikun, Gyuu… Bikun, Giri… Biku Biku, Mishi… Gakuburu
「Wa! Hajime-san! You're crushing! You'll crush my hand!」
Mekya!

「Hii! I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I got ahead of myself! Please let go, I'll break! My hand will break!」

「Trying to casually create a good mood, are you? Isn't your room next door?」

Puru puru, Shea trembled as she tried to relieve the hand Hajime was clasping; still, his hand was like a vise.

「N, now then, it's about time we go to bed, right~☆Now, how about a goodnight kiss. You gave me one before.」

「Like hell I did. That was a lifesaving measure.」

After conquering【Raisen Great Labyrinth,】they were thrown into an underwater vein like a toilet by Mildy Raisen. At that time, Shea witnessed an odd living creature and nearly drowned, coming back when Hajime performed artificial respiration…

And though this conversation had repeated itself multiple times, Shea had, at the time, made full use of her physical strength and attacked Hajime, giving him a deep kiss. Naturally, he peeled her away and threw her back into the fountain… but for Shea, it was an important memory of her first kiss.

Hajime responded coldly to Shea who appealed to him in dissatisfaction, but this shameless rabbit was not discouraged. Like a great detective hunting down the criminal, she had a happy face and objected.

「No, I know you're a softie, Hajime-san! From the very start, you've been gentle. It's an established fact… Gu he he

『Mekyu Baki』Shtooop～～! It'll break～～!」

Unable to endure listening to Shea's poor planning, Hajime inadvertently put too much strength into his grip.

She crouched at the edge of the bed, enduring the pain, as she held her now freed hand.

After Shea left, Hajime looked up at Yue. Since he was resting on her lap, he was looking straight at her.

「Actually, Yue. You rarely stop her these days, don't you? What changed?」

Yue tilted her head hearing Hajime's doubts. As Hajime said, once they escaped from【Raisen Great Labyrinth,】Yue was quite generous toward Shea.

She stopped getting angry at their pointless dialogue and personal contact like she did before. Still, excessive actions, like the kiss from before, as an example, put her in a bad mood.

「… Shea worked hard. She will work hard from now on. Because she likes you and me.」

「Hm? Well, that's true…」「… I… also don't hate her.」

「I suppose things really have changed. Well, I guess I can see why. Hmm～」

Hajime, from the few words Yue said, knew that Yue liked Shea far more than she let on.

But that was obvious.

In 【Raisen Great Labyrinth,】the magic suppression was far stronger than in the canyon. Yue was unable to demonstrate her abilities. It was no different for Hajime. If it were just the two, their travels would have been much more difficult. Hajime would likely have been able to clear it alone; however, he would probably have had to consume as much as twice the Holy Water. The reason they could clear the Labyrinth without doing so was because of Shea.

Shea was completely unrelated to their journey until just a short time ago, not to mention, their relationship was weak. She was sure to feel fear and unease.

Despite that, she did not whine even once and stuck with Hajime and Yue. In the hell known as a Great Labyrinth, she grit her teeth and even conquered it.

She single-mindedly acted to further her friendship with Yue and her love with Hajime. Shea changed herself with all her might, just so she could be with the two.

Naturally, Yue had a natural desire to monopolize his heart, so she could not easily accept Shea's feelings for Hajime. Though she was

cruel initially…

Toward Shea who simply jumped past her unkindness and asked for their friendship again and again, and her ability to help them clear the Great Labyrinth… she had changed.

Thinking about it, Yue did not have any memories of making friends. Before she was sealed, she was busy studying and dealing with the affairs of her country, there was no one who could be a friend on equal standing. In other words, she was alone.

Shea, who spoke to her equally, saying 「Let's be friends～!」and ignoring the issue with her and Hajime, was not something she looked down on.

Under those circumstances, she decided 「Well, I'll be a little easy on Shea…」

「… And.」

「Hm?」

Hajime looked up at Yue as she continued. With confident, strong, resolute, sincere eyes, she smiled dazzlingly, removing all else from existence. She was too cute, too beautiful; Hajime instinctively held his breath. His gaze gravitated toward her, and he could not help but admire her. Yue also looked at Hajime in return.

「… Hajime's heart, it's already mine.」「… 」

Whoever comes to like you, whoever enters your heart…

— You’re mine.

That was her declaration. It was Yue’s proclamation of war. Toward those they had met until now and toward those they would meet in the future.

Hajime could say nothing. Yue’s shining eyes seemed to suck him in. Yue, too, was trapped in Hajime’s gaze. Hajime’s hand quietly touched her cheek, and she placed her hand atop his. The moonlight projected their silhouette on the wall as they drew close, eventually overlapping entirely.

And the moment they were about to combine…

「Gusu, um, could you at least not forget my existence? It’s lonely… Gusu.」

Shea was scratching at the edge of the bed while she gazed at Hajime and Yue as they entered their own world.

Hajime felt bad seeing Shea's far-too-pitiful appearance, while Yue gestured for her to join. 「Yue-zaa~n!」 Shea shouted as she dove into Yue's chest and cried. She soon stopped, engrossed in the

pleasure of Yue patting her head, and eventually fell into a deep sleep.

Hajime smiled bitterly seeing the two.

「Rather than a friend, aren't you like a mother?」

「… It would be good if she were your child.」「… 」

「… Won't you be a bit nicer to Shea?」「… I'll take it step by step.」

「Yeah… I love you.」「… Yeah.」

In the end, Yue slept to his right and they shared the bed with Shea who lay to his left.

Afterward, Shea was allowed to stay with them, and every evening Hajime would punish her for getting too ahead of herself.

As an aside, Shea's screams as she was clasping Hajime's hands before only served to further deepen Sona's misunderstanding, causing her to further improve her sneaking skills… but that is a separate story.

Karan, karan. The door to the Brook branch of the Adventurer's Guild sounded. The shadow of three people, Hajime, Yue, and Shea, who had become celebrities, entered.

In the guild cafe, several adventurers passed their time. When they noticed the three, there were many who raised their hand to greet them. Obviously, there were those who gazed longingly toward Yue and Shea as well as envious gazes toward Hajime; still, there was nothing malicious here.

Of course, Hajime would not be bothered by it. At one point, someone cried out, 「Let's duel!」By then, Hajime had already shot off a nonlethal rubber-coated bullet, causing the man to flip about three times and kiss the ground.

Under those circumstances, in this town, with Yue, the "Crotch Smasher," completely in love with Hajime, the "Dream Smasher," the two were acknowledged as superior, even before a fight began. Though not formal, the guild party name of "Smash Lovers" floated around; when Hajime learned of it, he looked to the distance for some time.

By the way, Shea shed tears as her existence was simply too thin.
「Oh, the three of you are together again today?」

When Hajime approached the counter, as always, the old wo…

Catherine, called out to them … Unexpectedly, it had been Catherine who met them the most at the guild this week, whether it be Hajime alone or Shea and Yue together.

「Yeah. We're heading out of town tomorrow. I'm indebted to you, so I thought I'd say my goodbyes. Incidentally, I was wondering if there were any requests that would take us on our way to our

destination.」

He truly was indebted; Hajime had used a guild room free of charge. He wanted a spacious room to test out his Gravity Magic, and Catherine allowed him to use it as they wished.

As for Yue and Shea, they had trained their Gravity Magic in the outskirts.

「I see. So you're going. It'll be a bit lonely. It would be good if you could liven things up and return～」

「Give me a break. That thing at the inn, that thing at the clothing store, and everyone bowing before Yue and Shea while saying, "Onee-sama!" as well as their odd stalker, and those idiots who challenged us to a duel… It was about 70% weird people and 30% idiots… 」

Everything Hajime complained about with an unpleasant expression was true. To say nothing of Sona, Crystabel licked her lips like a carnivore whenever she saw Hajime; he felt a chill numerous times.

Furthermore, Brook was now composed of three major factions which competed with one another on a daily basis. One said 「Step on me, Yue-chan」, another said, 「I want to be Shea's slave」, and the last said 「Onee-sama, please stay with us.」It was literally a war amongst the various wishes held in the town thanks to the accomplishments the group had achieved.

Needless to say, they were all blown away by the three. The first

man prostrated himself in the middle of town and

shouted 「Please step on me!」toward Yue. He was already fearful.

As for Shea, he could not fathom their thought process since he thought Demi-humans as a whole were discriminated against. There were a number of verbal jabs he could do.

As for the other group, they tried to ignore Hajime or get rid of him. One girl even thrust a knife at him while yelling 「You're a parasite to them～～!!」

Because it would be a problem if every girl in town tried to murder him, Hajime had stripped the girl naked, tied her up tortoise-shell style (this world lacked such knowledge,) and hung her from the highest building in town with a sign saying "I will kill the next." Needless to say, their excessive actions died down.

Catherine smiled bitterly as Hajime recalled the events with a frown.

「Well, it was lively at least.」「It drained my energy.」

「So, where are you going?」「Fyuren.」

Catherine managed her job as they casually chatted. In an instant, she began looking for requests related to Fyuren.

【Fyuren】was a neutral commercial city. Hajime's destination was

【Guryuen Desert】which held 【Guryuen Volcano,】one of the Seven Great Labyrinths. It was to the west and on the way was 【Neutral Commerce City Fyuren.】In addition to that, another of the Great Labyrinths, 【Undersea Ruins Merjinne,】was also located to the west, beneath the sea.

「Hm～ Oh. Here's a good one. It's a guard request. There's an opening for one… how about it? Will you take it?」

Hajime took the application Catherine presented to him and confirmed the contents. Certainly, it was a guard request for a caravan. It was a medium- scale caravan, too, and there was a request for fifteen people to guard it. Since Yue and Shea were not registered as adventurers, they would act as a single entity with Hajime.

「Is it fine if they go with me?」

「Yeah, no problem. There won't be too many who would complain with this number, and many of the adventurers employ people to carry their luggage and have slaves with them. Also, Yue-chan and Shea-chan are strong, so it's like they'll get two more excellent adventurers for the price of one… There's no reason for them to refuse.」

「I see, Hmm～ What should I do?」

Hajime hesitated a little as he looked back at Yue and Shea, requesting their opinion. Honestly, this was essentially a delivery request. Furthermore, since he had a magically-driven car, he could reach Fyuren far more quickly than the caravan could. It would take a lot more time and effort with guard duty involved.

「… There's no need to rush our journey.」

「That's right～ It's good to mingle with other adventurers, too. Maybe you can learn something from old adventurers?」

「… I see, well, I suppose it can't be helped to do this once in a while…」

Hajime nodded after hearing their opinion and formally received the request from Catherine. As Yue had said, it would take time to go through the Seven Great Labyrinths. There was no reason to rush their journey, and this may provide them with something unusual. Like Shea said, there might be information he could learn, too.

「Okay. Meet up at the front gate first thing in the morning.」
「Roger.」

After confirming Hajime had received the written request, Catherine looked at Yue and Shea behind him.

「You also need to take care of this boy, okay? If you make him cry, I'll make sure to give you a good beating.」

「… Yes, Indebted. Thank you.」

「Yeah, thank you very much, Catherine-san!」 Catherine relaxed as she heard their kind words.

She was especially happy with Shea who seemed to have forgotten she was a Demi-human after reaching this town. Of course, not

everyone looked kindly upon her, but Sona and Crystabel, as well as Catherine, did not discriminate against her. It was something natural that came to them. Shea did not realize it, but this town was as warm as her hometown in the forest.

「You too, don't make these girls cry, got it? Or else you'll be punished.」

「… Honestly, you're too involved. You don't even need to say it.」 Hajime responded to Catherine with a bitter smile. Catherine

then presented a letter to Hajime. He took it curiously. 「What is this?」

「I'm sure you'll get into plenty of trouble, so hold onto it. If you get in trouble with the guilds in other towns, show them the letter, it might come in handy.」

Catherine winked at him, causing Hajime to cramp up on instinct. Who on earth was she that she could influence them like this? His doubt showed on his face.

「Oh, didn't you know? A good woman always has a few secrets.」
「… Haa, like I would know that. Thanks, I'll take it.」

「It's good that you're obedient! Anyway, don't die.」

Catherine, the guild staff from a small town, was a mystery. She

sent Hajime off with an attractive smile as was her charm.

Afterward, Hajime arrived at Crystabel's place. Though Hajime wanted to refuse, Yue and Shea wanted to go by all means, so he reluctantly went with them…

However, the moment she heard they were leaving, Crystabel, as quickly as a giant demon attacking him, buried Hajime in a hug, giving him a crushing fear. Though Yue and Shea desperately stopped the impact… the small details will be omitted.

After hearing it was their last night, Sona, in a dignified manner, charged into the room while they were in the bath. She was hung all night, tied tortoise-shell style by her mother, and the story for that will also be omitted. As for why her mother knew that, that, too, will be left aside.

The next morning.

Were they having fun? Many of the townspeople of Brook saw Hajime off as he met up with the adventurers who received the escort job. With them following Hajime's group and the fourteen adventurers at the entrance, the start of their journey was noisy.

「H, hey, aren't those two the "Smash Lovers!?"」

「Seriously! I'm a bit happy and afraid knowing what might happen if something attacks us!」

「Look, my hand hasn't stopped trembling for a while, has it?」

「No, isn't that just from your alcoholism?」

There were many who were happy to see Yue and Shea as well as many who had tears in their eyes as they covered their crotches with their hands, and there were many who trembled as they found out Hajime would be their companion. Hajime approached with a sour expression and was met with a mediator for the caravan.

「Are you the last of the guards?」「Yeah. Here's my application.」

Hajime took out the application form. After confirming the contents, the mediator nodded and introduced himself.

「My name is Moore Yunker. I am the leader of this caravan. Though you're still Blue rank, I heard from Catherine-san that you were an excellent adventurer. I expect much from your abilities on this journey.」

「… Moore Yunker? You're the leader of this caravan..」

Hajime looked pityingly at this man with a name which reminded him of a certain Japanese energy drink. Though the man did not understand, he could only smile bitterly as if saying,

「Well, I'm used to it.」

「Well, I don't think I'll fail to live up to those expectations. I am Hajime. These two are Yue and Shea.」

「How reliable… By the way, this rabbit girl… Any thoughts on selling her? I'm sure I can give you an appropriate amount.」

Moore looked at Shea as if appraising her. She was a blue-white-haired, blue-eyed beauty of the Rabbit Clan. As a merchant, he could not help but praise this rare commodity. He thought she was a slave from her collar and proposed buying her from Hajime who he felt was her owner. He was surely an excellent merchant.

「Uu」Shea, receiving this glance, hid herself behind Hajime. Yue looked sternly at Moore. Still, the Demi-humans from the Sea of Trees were seen as slaves, so it was natural to negotiate a price when finding an unusual slave. There was no need to blame Moore.

「Ohh, she seems to like you a lot… I guess you've prized her quite a bit. Will you allow me to look at her?」

「Hm, you seem a bit rushed, and I'm sure you're an excellent merchant… So, you know my answer, right?」

Though Moore was interested in Shea and proposed this to further negotiate with Hajime, Hajime's response was simple. Moore, also, felt Hajime would not part with her, but still, Shea was an attractive opportunity for a profit, so he thought to up the stakes in the negotiation.

Hajime read his intentions. He spoke frankly and with firm words to Moore.

「I have no intention to part with her, even to God… you understand, right?」

「… Yes, I see. It can't be helped. I will withdraw here. However, if the thought ever passes to mind, please think of Yunker. This journey will be a long one, and it will start soon. Please listen to the guard leader for further instructions.」

Hajime's words were dangerous. If he said anything in an unskilled manner, he may have been reported to the Saint Church as a heretic. Humans as a whole believed in different gods, but there was no god higher than "Eht" in existence, so it was foolish to pick a fight with the Saint Church.

Still, he was not in the mood to change his remarks, so Moore understood that he would not part with Yue or Shea no matter the circumstances.

Hajime watched Moore walk dejectedly to the caravan and noticed the noisy surroundings.

「Amazing… He said that all for one woman… Crazy!」

「Yeah, no wonder he's the Dream Smasher. He won't forgive anyone who lays a hand on his women…」

「Nice～ I wish someone would say something like that for me once.」

「No, you're a man, right? Who the hell would, ah, sorry, I'm sorry～～!!」

Hajime held his head, feeling an oncoming headache, as he heard

his traveling companions converse.

In the end, the people from Brook were truly idiots. When he thought this, “Munyuu,” he felt something soft on his back as arms closely embraced him.

When Hajime looked back, he saw Shea’s jaw lying on his shoulder. Her face was flush and loose in joy.

「… Got it? There’s no special meaning, understand? You’re not misunderstanding me, are you?」

「U fu fu fu, I understand～ U fu fu fu～」

Though Hajime said he meant nothing to the very end, she was thinking of the words “my woman” to the very end as the people in the surroundings spoke. “ I have no intention to part with her, even to God,” she was happy to hear him say those words.

Hearing the talk around him, Hajime thought “Did I go too far?” Yue, standing beside him, tugged on his sleeve.

「? What is it, Yue?」

「Mm… It’s fine, you looked cool.」

「… Thanks for the words of comfort.」

While she sympathized with Hajime, he gently stroked her cheeks. Yue narrowed her eyes in happiness.

Early in the morning, before the front gate, in front of many others, a beautiful rabbit girl clung to the back of a man whose hand was stroking a fair-haired beauty's cheek. That man was Nagumo Hajime.

The women of the caravan looked at them warmly, while the men had dead eyes. Their annoyance was surely a consequence of their own deeds.

The distance between Brook and 【Neutral Commerce City Fyuren】was about 6 days by wagon.

They moved before sunrise and prepared camp before sunset. This was now day 3. So far, they had covered half the journey, and they were moving well. Hajime and the girls remained at peace as they stayed in the rear.

Today, there was nothing special as they began preparing camp. The adventurers created their own meals since no one amongst the caravan could remain calm should they eat together. It was an implicit understanding that they eat separately.

The adventurers ate simple meals; preparing good dishes only took up luggage space, which would be an issue in an emergency. It was basic theory to fill the belly with delicious food once they reached the town.

Hajime listened to the others talk as he dipped his soft bread into a

stew they had prepared.

「Kaaa, delicious! Really, this dish is great, Shea-chan! I don't care if you're a Demi-human, won't you marry me?」

「Gatsu gatsu, Gokun, Puhaaa, what're you running your mouth off for, Shea-chan's my bride!」

「Ha, what do you know? Shea-chan, how about a meal when we reach town? My treat.」

「Th, then Yue-chan can eat with me!」「Yue-chan's spoon… Haa, haa.」

The adventurers filled their bellies with the meal Shea cooked, one after another.

On the first day, many took out portable cookers and dried meat as they ate while Hajime took out tableware and other tools from "Treasure Warehouse." Naturally, the dishes they ate gave off a good smell, which attracted many a gaze. When the three began eating, the many people were looking at the group with bloodshot eyes, drooling all the while. As a result of Shea's proposal, they arrived at the current situation.

At first, Hajime calmly ate his meal as he let them starve like dogs. Of course, he had no desire to share.

However, after Shea took charge of the meals, he depended on her. Hajime and Yue could only make flat dishes. Hajime made simple dishes that were rough at best while Yue was a formal royal and had no experience.

Since Shea made delicious meals, if she proposed they share, Hajime could not easily refuse.

Like that, the adventurers crowded around her like hyenas when mealtime came around. They were thankful at first, but they eventually got carried away and began hitting on Shea and Yue.

Gyaa, gyaa, before the adventurers making a ruckus, Hajime silently activated “Overpower.” Their bodies, warmed by the stew, were immediately frozen. Hajime swallowed the meat in his mouth as he slowly looked upward. Many people whispered around him.

「So? Who wants to empty their belly right now?」

「「「「「We apologize for getting carried away!」」」」」

The adventurers splendidly prostrated themselves and apologized all at once. Most of them were older than Hajime and were old adventurers, but they held no dignity. Regardless of the effects of Overpower, no one would act against Hajime because they knew of his reputation in Brook.

「Really, Hajime-san. This is meal-time, can’t you get along? It, it doesn’t matter, anyway, I belong to you.」

「Like that matters.」「Hauu!?」

Shea shyly and casually appealed to Hajime, but was cut down with a single phrase.

「… Hajime.」

「Hm? What is it, Yue…」

Hajime flinched seeing Yue's reproachful gaze.

Yue placed her index finger on Hajime, 「… Meh!」In short, she was reminding him of his promise to be kinder to Shea. Hajime did not hold a strong fondness for Shea; at most, she was closer to a distant relative… but that did not seem enough for Yue.

「Haijme -san! Stop acting like that, or "you'll be burned" as well, here, have some meat!」

Furthermore, Shea was not discouraged anymore. Rather, she was revived immediately upon receiving Hajime's harming words and became more aggressive.

「… Why do you even know that phrase … no, never mind. I understand. Hurry up and hand over the meat.」

「Fu fu, do you want to eat it? Then aahh~」「…」

Shea held skewered meat with a blush on her face. She wanted him

to eat it. Hajime looked at Yue who took another skewer and held it aloft. Most likely, she wanted to do what Shea was doing as well.

While feeling the gaze of his fellow adventurers, he let out a sigh. Hajime opened his mouth and looked at Shea. She was clearly

joyful. 「Ahh～」「…」

Hajime silently bit the meat presented to him. Howaaa～ Shea stared at Hajime. At that time, a skewer was presented to him from the other side.

「… Ahh～」「… 」

Paku, again, he silently chewed. Once again, Shea poked him from the side, saying 「Ahh～」Yue as well, said 「Ahh～」

Ignoring the subjectivity of the person in question, the voices in the minds of the surrounding men were clearly saying 「Hurry up and explode!」They were clear on the relationship between Hajime and the girls, making them all feel indescribably empty.

2 days later, there was a tasteless attack which broke the peace of the journey.

Shea noticed it first. Pico pico, her rabbit ears shook as she looked at the forest along the road. Her face grew stern in an instant as she warned them.

「Enemy attack! More than one hundred! They're coming from the forest!」

Hearing her warning, the adventurers grew tense. The road was along the woods and was typically safe, since it was a route to a commercial town. Still, there were rumors about demon attacks, but they numbered twenty, forty at the most.

「Shit, more than one hundred? I haven't heard about any attacks recently, were they gathering? Honestly, what the hell is with those investigation teams?」

The leader of the caravan, Gartem, muttered to himself. The caravan guards numbered fifteen in all. With Yue and Shea included, it was seventeen people. With this number of people, it would be difficult to perfectly defend the caravan. This was simply how it was with such a numerical advantage.

By the way, the reason Shea was counted despite being of the Rabbit Clan whose species was known to be gentle was due to a particular incident in Brook when she lost her temper with the group who said 「Let's be Shea's slave!」 Using her fist, she blew away one of the perverts, making her more well known amongst the adventurers.

Gartem considered allowing the majority of them to go, leaving the caravan alone, when a proposal interrupted his thoughts.

「Rather than hesitating, why not let us kill them?」 「Eh?」

Hajime spoke in a lighthearted tone. Hearing his unbelievable proposal, Gartem gripped his fist and asked in a stunned voice.

「Are you telling us you can annihilate them? Is that what you're saying?」

「N, no, it would be difficult protecting the caravan perfectly at this rate… but can you do it? Even if the demons here aren't that strong, that number…」

「No problems with this number. We'll finish it up soon. Yue will, at least.」

Pon, Hajime placed his hand on Yue's shoulder beside him. Yue did not particularly seem eager or nervous, she simply said 「Mm…」 as if she were just doing her job.

Gartem hesitated momentarily. He heard rumors of Yue being a user of rare magic, and, even if she was not able to annihilate them all as Hajime said, Hajime's attitude was a confident one. Rather than putting the entire group at risk, it was a better strategy to distribute the war potential.

「I understand. I'll leave it to you, Yue-chan. It would be good if you could reduce their numbers a lot, even if you can't annihilate them all. We'll thin them out even more with our magic and fight them at the end. Everyone, got it!?」

「「「「Yes, sir!」」」」

The adventurers energetically responded to Gartem's decision. Apparently, they did not readily believe that Yue could defeat

them alone. Still, Hajime was not worried. Common sense said there was no magic user who could annihilate one hundred demons so easily. He simply shrugged his shoulders.

The adventurers took up their position, forming a united front, in front of the caravan. Though there was tension, they were all prepared. The atmosphere they held as they joked and ate before was not present. Though some of the old adventurers told stories before, they were still caught up by the atmosphere. The people in the caravan stood in fright as they heard the demons move. Some looked from the shadow of the wagons.

Hajime stood on one of the carriages.

「Yue, for now, relax and chant. It will cause problems later on otherwise.」

「… Chant… chant…?」「… You don't know?」「… It's fine, I'm ready.」

「No, that's not… never mind.」

「They'll be here in about 10 seconds～」

Because it would be problematic if they were chased, Hajime wanted Yue to chant an aria; however, since Yue originally never needed one, it was easy to see a "?" floating above her head. Still, people would simply assumed she whispered the incantation to herself, so it would not pose such a large problem.

When Shea called out to them, Yue pointed her right hand to the forest and began reciting an aria.

「His brilliant light will shine from the darkness, Shatter the ancient prison, Overcome all obstacles, Break the strongest with his power, He will become the light which swallows even the heavens, “Thunder Dragon.”」

Yue’s chant ended as she released her magic. In that moment, a dragon made of thunder appeared beneath dark clouds. It was reminiscent of an eastern dragon, shaped like a snake.

「Wh, what is that…」 Someone muttered those words.

Though there was a crowd of demons in their presence, they looked up to the sky at the strange Thunder Dragon. Even those well versed in magic had their mouths open in awe as they watched a magic they had never even heard of.

It was not just their allies, either.

Even the demons which came out of the woods, filled with murderous intent, halted in place as the huge Thunder Dragon flew down from the skies. They shook, like frogs stared at by a snake.

As if bringing judgment down from the heavens, Yue swung her finger like a baton; the heavens cried, as if singing, and the Thunder Dragon opened its maw, attacking the demons before it.

Gogaaaaa!!! 「Uwa!?」「Dowaa!?」「Kyaaa!!」

The Thunder Dragon let loose a terrific roar as it opened its mouth. The demons nearby jumped into its jaw voluntarily, disappearing into the thunder.

Furthermore, according to Yue's movements, the Thunder Dragon coiled around and surrounded the demons, becoming a wall and destroying those which tried to escape.

Every time it let loose a roar, the nearby demons jumped in as if they chose to die. They had no time to suffer, they simply saw the massive dragon and returned to dust.

The Thunder Dragon swallowed all demons, letting loose one last cry before disappearing.

The adventurers who stood before the caravan ducked down and screamed as they heard thunder crash.

Once the fearsome atmosphere died down, they opened their eyes and looked forward…

There was nothing there anymore, only the scorched earth. It was proof that the unbelievable spectacle occurred.

「… Mm, too much.」

「Hey, hey, I never knew magic like that existed…」

「Is that Yue-san's original magic? This must be what Hajime-san was talking about earlier.」

「While I was shutting myself in the guild, you made this…

actually, Yue, that aria a moment ago…」「Yeah… for the future, I sang.」

Doyaa! Yue looked at Hajime expressionlessly, but she had pride in her ability.

Hajime quietly stroked her hair and smiled wryly. She had chanted on purpose to avoid trouble in the future. It may have been pointless for her to chant in order to avoid future troubles,

— Yue original Compound Thunder-Gravity Magic, "Thunder Dragon."

It was a compound magic of the Advance Rank magic, "Thunder Mallet," and the Age of Gods Magic, Gravity Magic which she obtained from 【Raisen Great Labyrinth.】

The Thunder Magic generated lightning bolts which she was able to control at her will with Gravity Magic. She focused it into the shape of a dragon which reminded Hajime once again how much sense Yue had for magic.

The adventurers who had been looking at the scorched earth began looking back. They talked all at once as they gazed at the three.

「Hey, what the hell was that? What was it!」

「A, A strange living thing… in the sky, the sky… is this a dream?」「He he, I'll get married when I get to town.」

「I understand what you mean. Though you don't have even a female friend, let alone a lover.」

「It wouldn't be strange for it to happen with a weird magic like that!」

「No, that's unrelated, right? Anyway, both are weird, aren't they?」

「What!? You, you calling Yue-chan weird!? Huh!?」

「Shut it! Listen, Yue-chan is a goddess, everything is explained

with that!」

「「「「I see!」」」」

Yue's magic held an impact, and it seemed to have broken some of the adventurers. Still, that could not be helped. After all, there was no magic that could move about like a living creature. Even for a magic user that could freely manipulate the country, it was impossible for them to wield such odd magic. It was top rank just to be able to utilize a magic like "Thunder Mallet."

They broke and began screaming 「Yue- sama, Cheers!」Only the leader, Gartem, sighed as he walked up to Hajime.

「Haa, first of all, thanks. Thanks to Yue-chan, there were zero casualties.」

「We're coworkers, there's no need, right?」「… Right, work.」

「Ha ha, I see… so, what was that just now?」

Gartem could not hide his curiosity. 「… Original.」

「O, Original? You created that magic? An Advance Rank magic, no, is it even possible to do that?」

「… I didn't make it. Compound Magic.」

「Compound Magic? What on earth did you combine…」「… Secret.」

「… Well, I guess so. Adventurers shouldn't reveal their trump card so easily…」

With a heavy sigh, Gartem gave up pursuing the issue further. He was sensitive to the basic rule of old adventurers. He shrugged his shoulders and returned to his broken companions. It seemed a new "Yue" religion had sprouted, and Gartem had his work cut out for him.

With looks of respect and fear from the people of the caravan, they resumed their journey.

After that day, there were no particular problems, and they eventually reached the Neutral Commerce City Fyuren.

There were six receptionists along the eastern gate to the town, performing checks on all that entered. Hajime and the others were lined up and awaited their turn.

Atop the roof of a wagon, he rested his head on Yue's lap while Shea sat next to him when Moore approached. He had something to talk about. Hajime nodded at Moore who looked up at him in amazement and jumped down.

「You really are bold. Aren't you worried about the eyes on you?」

「Well, it's annoying, but I guess it can't be helped. Worrying about them is pointless.」

Moore smiled wryly as Hajime shrugged.

「There will be more problems in Fyuren. If you ever think of selling her…」

Though Moore negotiated to buy Shea casually, their talks had ended already. Seeing Hajime's silent insistence, he raised his hands

in defeat.

「You didn't come here for this, did you? What did you want to talk about?」

「No, it's something like that. I'm here to bargain with you. Your artifacts. I would like to buy them. If you come with me to have the procedures witnessed, I will guarantee you an amount of money which would allow you to live in luxury all your life without the need to worry. Your Aartifacts, especially "Treasure Warehouse," is something a merchant like me is desperate for.」

"Something he is desperate for," in short, Moore's "desperate" could mean "I would kill for it." His eyes were not smiling in the least. With an item like that, he would solve one of the main issues he had as a merchant, the safe, costly transportation of large amounts of goods.

Moore had seen Hajime take things out of his "Treasure Warehouse" while they camped, and he felt like a man stranded in the desert who had just found an oasis after wandering for days on end. Hajime let loose some blood lust toward this merchant who was far too persistent in his negotiations; perhaps the man's intuition as a merchant sounded alarm bells, as he withdrew.

However, he did not give up. He wished to negotiate for Donner & Schlag as well.

「No matter how many times you say it, I have no intent to step back. Give up.」

「But those artifacts are far too useful for an individual. Won't they be ineffective for someone who doesn't understand their value? Things could become quite troublesome… for example, those girl's bodies!?」

The moment Moore turned his eyes to Yue and Shea who sat on the roof, he felt something cold and hard press against him. Accompanying that feeling was a natural thirst for death.

No one in the surroundings noticed. The two were in the shadow of the wagon, and Hajime had focused his intent with pinpoint accuracy.

「Should I take that as a declaration of war?」

He spoke quietly. However, his voice was cold and his eyes focused on Moore, drowning the man in darkness. Moore had a cold sweat over his entire body and desperately squeezed out his voice.

「N, no. Please… I, guu … You… need to be more secretive… is what I was saying… That's all…」

It was as Moore said, Hajime was not seriously hiding his artifacts or abilities. With a little thought, he could avoid many problems like when he had Yue chant; saying it another way, he did not think about concealing anything, since he needed only surpass the obstacles "a little bit." Hajime, in this world, had decided to "not hold back" against any hostility. He had such a resolution.

「I see. So that's what you were saying.」

Hajime released his killing intent and put away Donner. Moore collapsed where he stood and panted. He was drenched in sweat.

「It's up to you to decide what you want to do. You can spread things around or take action yourself; but if I sense any amount of hostility… don't think you'll live. I don't care about the might of this country or the power of the world. I will sink everything in a sea of blood.」

「… Ha ha, I see. This really isn't worth the effort.」 Though he was still pale, Moore courageously responded, as

expected of an excellent merchant. From his bearing, he was well off himself, but he desired those objects. He would typically stay strong here, but Hajime's artifacts drew him mad.

「Well, I'll overlook it this time. Don't do this again, okay?」

「… I understand. I apologize as well. I was blinded by my greed and tried to kick the ass of a dragon…」

"Kick the ass of a dragon" was a proverb in this world.

A dragon was a member of the Dragon Clan. They had supreme attack strength and nigh impregnable defenses across their entire body. Excluding the eyes and the mouth, the only weakness they had would be near the anus. Given their height and attack power, they slept deeply. Being awoken by stimulation down there would throw them into a rage.

Perhaps foolish people thought of this idea long ago and were quickly crushed. In short, this phrase became associated with such folly to describe a harmless individual placing his hands on a beast.

By the way, it was assumed that the Dragon Clan fell to ruination over 500 years ago. The reasons were unclear, but they were rumored to have a unique magic, “Dragon Form,” blurring their boundaries with both humans and demons. As such, they were discriminated against by all which eventually led to their downfall. Others thought the gods destroyed them. There were a number of theories.

「Which reminds me, Yue-chan’s magic was imitating a dragon. But is there a dragon like that? I don’t know much about the Dragon Clan, but didn’t it look more like a snake then a dragon? I guess you’re safe because of that.」

Moore recovered, tidying himself up as he gave more advice to Hajime. He really was bold. Given the circumstances, he narrowly escaped death, yet he was able to talk normally now. His nerves were obviously not normal.

「Is that so?」

「Yes, there are stories of odd people who can become demons as well. Either way, she’s strong, frightening, and an infidel who does not believe in God. With this much, her existence will be scrutinized by the Church.」

「I see. Actually, you’re quite like that, too. Aren’t you a

believer?」

「The God I believe in is a “Human.” That person is a “Customer.”」

「… Somehow, I think I understand you better. You’re a born merchant, I can only bow to your recklessness.」

He looked proudly toward Hajime who was playing with the ring on his finger. Moore had a complex expression. His attitude as a merchant, strong throughout life, was no longer present. He had completely lost to Hajime’s blood lust.

「Although I committed a terrible mistake, please associate with my company if you need anything. You are different from the typical adventurer. Please allow me to have a connection to such a peculiar man.」

「… Your business spirit really is strong.」

「Excuse me,」 Moore said as he bowed and turned about.

Yue and Shea glanced strongly at Moore’s back. Though they had stopped by Fyuren to relax, it seemed more trouble awaited them than expected.

【Neutral Commerce City Fyuren】

It was a merchant town enclosed with walls 20 meters high,

running a total of 200 kilometers long. All forms of business and competition were present on a daily basis. There were many who achieved their dreams here and just as many to become penniless. Needless to say, it was a heavy sight-seeing city.

Fyuren was divided into four large areas.

The Central Ward, where basic crafting facilities were located, the Sightseeing Ward, where various amusement facilities had gathered, the Worker's Ward where artisans produced weapons and furniture, and, finally, the Commercial Ward where businesses were lined up.

There were main streets going north to south and east to west in every ward where the shops were lined up. There were many small shops in the back alleys, that is, black market shops.

Adventurers used to such rough areas often traveled through both paths.

Hajime and the girls were eating a light meal at a cafe near the Fyuren Branch Adventurer's Guild. Because the city was large, demand was massive for guides. Since there were many guides, they strove to improve their services as much as possible, so their credibility was guaranteed.

Hajime and the two separated from the caravan led by Moore and went to the Adventurer's Guild to get a guidebook so they could find various shops and hotels. There, they learned of the existence of the guides themselves.

The guide they found was a woman who introduced herself as Riche, and she taught them the basics of the city as they snacked.

「Because of this, I recommend you visit the Sightseeing Ward, but I'll show you a hotel for the time being. Though there are hotels in the Central Ward, there are plenty of people who have a tendency to steal, so it's not good compared to those in the Sightseeing Ward.」

「I see. Then we'll look at the Sightseeing Ward and find a hotel there. What do you recommend?」

「That depends on your demands. There are a variety of hotels.」
「I see. That's good, I'm fine as long as there's a bath. The location

doesn't matter, but, if possible, I would like a place that wouldn't mind freeing me of responsibility if something happens.」

Riche brightly heard Hajime's demand. 「Yeah, yeah」, she said, as she heard the first two demands and thought of a place in her mind. However, hearing Hajime's final words, she tilted her head.

「Um～ Freeing you of responsibility?」

「Yeah, for instance, if I get involved in a fight for which I am completely a victim, I'd rather not take responsibility for paying for damages to the hotel. Rather, it would be best if I could claim compensation for the trouble.」

「Um, so you expect to get into fights often…」 Hajime smiled

bitterly toward the perplexed Riche.

「Well, I just think that might be the case. We stand out, and there are a lot of people that could cause issues in the Sightseeing Ward, like people trying to get us to give them stuff or hitting on them. Well, only do this “if it’s possible.” Don’t worry about it if it’s too difficult.」

Hearing Hajime’s words, Riche glanced at Yue and Shea who were eating next to him. She nodded. Certainly, the two beauties stood out. Actually, those in the surroundings were glancing at them, especially toward Shea. Though it was considered a crime to put a hand on another person’s slave, there were merchants who were persistent in their negotiations and others who let loose and acted recklessly.

「Then wouldn’t a hotel with a good guard be suitable? If you want that, I can introduce you to a good hotel…」

「Ah, that’s fine. But sometimes they’re blinded by their desires. They usually try physical persuasion from the get go, so depending on a guard isn’t always the best option.」

「Ph, physical persuasion… I see, so that’s why you wanted to be freed of responsibility.」

Riche completely understood Hajime’s intent, so it was good that he had said “if possible,” but it hurt her spirit as a guide. Her expression was filled with motivation. She glanced at Yue and Shea and asked for their own demands. Her goal was to provide as much

of her customer's needs as possible.

「… It's fine if there's a bath, but mixed bathing would be best.」
「Um, a large bed is good.」

After thinking a little, Yue and Shea told their demands. Though their demands were normal in themselves, combining the two made their intention completely transparent.

Riche responded, 「Leave it to me, I understand 」, but her cheeks were slightly flushed. Seeing Hajime and the other two, her cheeks flushed even further.

By the way, the men surrounding them were all thinking 「If only looks could kill.」Needless to say, they were staring at Hajime, but since he was accustomed to such gazes, he sat as usual.

After hearing about the other wards, Hajime felt a strong gaze. This gaze was especially focused on Shea and Yue. It was a rude, disgusting gaze. Though Shea and Yue were not worried about it, they raised their eyebrows slightly.

Hajime gazed ahead… there he found a pig.

The man had a fat body, roughly 100 kilograms, and he had an oily complexion. He had good clothes, noticeable even from a distance. The pig man was staring at Yue and Shea with impure eyes.

The moment Hajime thought 「This is troublesome,」 the pig- man approached them. There was no time to run away, though Hajime was not in the mind to.

Riche noticed it as well, or perhaps the pig-man simply stood out that much. She forgot her business smile as the man approached and shamelessly said 「Geh!」

The pig-man approached Hajime's table and stared at Yue and Shea. Seeing Shea's collar, he squinted in disgust. As if he had just noticed Hajime at that moment, he made a one-sided arrogant demand.

「H, hey, brat. I'll give you 1000000 Ruta. Give me this rabbit. And this girl, she'll be my mistress. I'll take them both.」

The pig-man tried to touch Yue, as if she had belonged to him. In an instant, a violent murderous intent (Overpower) filled the area. Everyone turned pale and took distance from Hajime, their chairs falling down.

「Hii!?」 The pig-man, receiving the intent directly, fell over and screamed. His crotch showed signs of being wet; he was unable to pull away.

Conscious of the man's insignificance, Hajime quickly withdrew his killing intent.

「Yue, Shea, let's go. We're moving.」

Since the disgusting fluid began leaking nearby, Hajime stood up and called to Yue and Shea. In reality, he wanted to shoot the man immediately, but it would be a problem if he committed murder. Hajime would be an assailant. The guards would not be so naive as to leave that alone. As long as he could get an excuse of a legitimate self-defense, he could half-kill the man.

Seeing Hajime stand, Riche said 「Eh? Eh? 」and blinked in confusion. She was calm despite being in range of Hajime's "Overpower" because he excluded her. It was something of a reverse application of the "Overpower" ability he used on Moore.

Riche was confused because the pig-man suddenly fell backwards and started wetting himself.

By the way, the effect of "Overpower" hit everyone in the surroundings; they understood he was saying "anyone else want a go?"

Given how pale they were, they would do nothing.

But after resolving "Overpower" and leaving the guild, a large man approached Hajime. The man was 100 kilograms in a different sense from the pig-man. He had a large sword at his waist, and his body was muscular. He was clearly a soldier with a long record of service.

Perhaps catching his eye, the pig-man began screaming again. 「Th, that's right, Regnid! Kill that shitty brat! He, he tried to kill

me! Kill him!」

「Young master, it would be bad to kill him. I'll just half-kill him.」
「Do it! Go, go do it! D, don't touch the women! They're mine!」

「Got it. I expect a reward.」

「A, anything you want! Hurry up!」

Apparently the giant was called Regnid, and he seemed to be employed as the pig-man's guard. He smiled after hearing he would be rewarded. His eyes went to neither Yue nor Shea. He simply looked down at Hajime.

「Got it. Sorry. I'll half-kill you in an instant for my money. Nothing to do about it, girls… just give up now.」

Regnid brought his fists up. He was not going to use his sword. The surroundings were noisy, clearly from hearing his name.

「H, hey, Regnid, the "Black" Regnid?」

「Regnid the "Storm"!? Why is he a guard…」 「For money? So Regnid is a "money lover?"」

Hajime could gather some of the man's history from the surrounding voices. "Black" referred to his adventurer rank, which was third from the top rank amongst Adventurers. He was a strong man.

An urge to fight sprung from Regnid. For Hajime, this would clearly be considered a legitimate form of self -defense. The moment he prepared to fight, an unexpected voice restrained him.

「… Hajime, wait.」

「? What is it, Yue?」

Yue pulled Shea and stood between him and Regnid. For the two who were curious, Yue responded.

「… We will be his opponent.」「Eh? Yue-san, me too?」

Yue ignored Shea's question. Yue's words were an answer for Hajime. Regnid burst out in laughter.

「Ga ha ha ha ha, Sis, you want to be my opponent? Don't make me laugh. What, maybe you wanted to be my opponent at night!?」

「… Hold your tongue, trash.」

A rapid blade of wind shot toward Regnid who was blurting out indecent words, tearing up his cheek. Blood dripped down it; it was a deep cut.

Regnid fell silent, just as Yue had told him to. Her magic was too fast, he could not react at all. In his mind, he was thinking 「When did she chant? Where is the formation?」He desperately analyzed the situation with cold sweat drenching him.

Yue continued to talk to Hajime. Shea did not yet understand Yue's intentions.

「… We will make it known, we are not just women that need to be protected.」

「Ah, I see. We can also fight back.」

「… I see. Since you're doing that, feel free to go all out.」 Yue looked at Regnid with a severe gaze.

「Well, I'm certain you understand now. You thought we were simply maidens, but you didn't think we would be fierce animals. Fortunately, there are a lot of witnesses… yeah, that's fine, right?」

「… You savage beasts are terrible.」

Hajime consented to Yue's words as he smiled bitterly.

Yue, confirming Hajime's thoughts, signaled Shea with her eyes. Shea grasped Drücken on her back and rotated it once, giving it weight.

「Hey, you're a rabbit, aren't you, Sis? Even if you're following your owner's intent, don't you hate these kinds of things?」

Regnid spoke to Shea while looking at Yue. Shea, ignoring his words, advised him otherwise.

「Shouldn't you pull out that sword? I'll go easy on you, but won't it be dangerous to fight us bare-handed?」

「Haa, nice words, rabbit. Sorry, but you'll have to forgive me for hitting you once or twice!」

Regnid continued focusing on Yue and did not worry about Shea. He judged it would be difficult to stop Yue.

But Regnid should have noticed. Normally, he should have felt some incompatibility seeing a girl of the Rabbit Clan with the desire to fight despite being known as slaves with a strong sense of affection, especially after seeing the first two (Hajime and Yue, whose abilities he had caught sight of.)

Without saying a word, Shea grasped Drücken… and dashed

forward. She appeared in Regnid's sight in an instant.

「!?」

「Ya!!」

Regnid was astonished hearing the extremely powerful yet cute voice. He crossed his arms immediately and tried to defend…

(Isn't this too heavy!?)

Gusha! With a refreshing sound, Regnid crashed into the wall of the guild, letting out all the air in his lungs. His vision shook as he saw Shea slow down. She thought he was going to resist further.

He was a “Black,” amongst the top of adventurers, but even if he was going easy on her, he still lost. He could do nothing but laugh. Still, he frowned in pain instead. He tried to stand up but fell over from pain. His arm had been crushed.

Fortunately, it was just his right hand. He managed to stand up with his other arm. Though his vision shook, he managed to stand firmly. If it were not for the wall behind him, he likely would not have been able to stand at all.

Still, there was little standing could achieve.

Though Regnid stood up out of his own obstinacy, he grumbled seeing Yue thrust out her right hand with an ice-cold gaze in her eyes.

(Young master, no matter what, this isn’t worth it…) Immediately afterward, Regnid experienced “dancing on air,” the

worst experience of his life.

「Flowers dance and scatter, Let the wind burst, “Wind Flurry.」

— Yue Original Wind-Gravity Compound Magic, “Wind Flurry”

She used Gravity Magic to manipulate cannonballs of wind, causing them to surround a target and “drop continuously” on him. It was an unsophisticated magic which simply made the target a punching bag. By the way, this chant was also something she made up.

Once Regnid finished dancing in the air, he fell with an unpleasant sound and stopped moving.

In all actuality, he was knocked unconscious after only a few shots. Yue knew, but she continued on mercilessly and heavily aimed for his groin, causing the surrounding men to cower. Hajime sadly cried out seeing them from behind.

Seeing the two girls attack without mercy, silence filled the guild. No one moved and simply stared at Hajime. Even the guild personnel who came to stop the fight were shocked by the spectacle.

The silence was slowly broken, Hajime began walking. All gazes were on Hajime and his destination… the pig-man.

「Hii! G, get away! Wh, who do you think I am! I am Pum Min! I'm the son of Baron Min!」

「… Apologize to all the unforgivable character fans on Earth, pig.」

Hajime frowned and trampled on the pig-man's face. 「Pugya!?」

The man screamed like a pig and tried to look up.

He tried to scream, but Hajime increased the pressure to stop his

annoying voice. Before long, the man grew silent. He was either calming down enough to remain quiet or he had run out of energy.

「Hey, pig. Never come into my sight. Don't touch us, don't ask for us, don't try anything… Don't you dare follow us.」

Though Pum was being crushed by Hajime's sole, he trembled and nodded. He had no strength to bluff, either. His mind was broken.

However, Hajime was not so sweet as to allow it to pass. It was not enough to instill a temporary fear. If murder was something he could not do, then he had to carve an unforgettable fear.

Hajime relaxed his foot a little and trampled down again, the spikes from his shoe released.

「Gyaaaaaaaa!!」

The spikes made countless holes in Pum's face, thrusting even into the man's eye, causing a mass of blood to flow out. Pum fainted in pain. When Hajime removed his foot, his disgusting… no, it was a tragic face in the first place; the face had not changed significantly, but it was blood-stained.

Hajime looked up at Yue and Shea with a refreshing expression. They also greeted him with a smile. Hajime tried to smile at their guide, Riche, who stood to the side, but she simply stared back in blank surprise.

「Now then, miss guide, please continue showing us around.」

「Hahii! N, no, um, I, how should I say it…」

The confused Riche was fearful of Hajime's smile, causing her to become incoherent. It was obvious from her expression that she wanted no relation with them.

Hajime was clearly abnormal. Though Hajime could tell that much, it would be troublesome to look for a new guide after all that happened. As such, he did not want to let Riche go.

Realizing Hajime's intent, Yue and Shea surrounded Riche who let out a miserable scream.

And there, new guild staff arrived, acting as her savior.

「Um, I'm sorry, but please cooperate with the investigation.」

A male staff member from three who approached Hajime spoke up. There were many more looking at Pum and Regnid's condition.

「That pig flew into a rage when I stopped him from taking my companions away. There's no need to say anything else. The guide and the people here are witnesses, especially those in the nearby tables. They were listening quite intently, right?」

Hajime glared at the surrounding people; they nodded quickly again and again.

「I understand, but since this is a problem which started within the

guild, we need to judge things fairly and listen to the complaints of both parties concerned… This is a rule all adventurers must follow…」

「Both parties concerned… huh?」

Hajime looked at Pum and Regnid. Given their current state, they were not waking up. The guild staff were looking for a healer, but it was not likely they would wake up even after being taken care of by two or three healers.

「Won't it be a while before they wake up? We're the victims, right? Rather… shouldn't you kick them out?」

Hajime glanced at the guild staff in criticism. The man wanted to complain at what seemed like a typical chronic complainer, 「Don't glare at me like that, this is just my job.」 While arguing with these words, the situation only grew more confusing

Hajime reluctantly tried to compromise. A dignified voice suddenly stopped the argument.

「What are you doing? What in the world is going on?」

A slim man with glasses who exuded an intellectual atmosphere looked sternly at Hajime.

「Head Secretary Dot! You're here! Actually…」

The staff members crowded around the man named Dot. After

hearing their story, he gazed sharply at Hajime.

Apparently, they would not be freed quite yet.

The man known as Head Secretary Dot pushed his glasses up with his middle finger as he spoke to Hajime.

「I heard the general story. There are many witnesses, and things may be exactly as you said, but you went too far… Well, I'll take it you allowed them to live. Still, I would like you to provide proof of identity since I assume you'll be staying in Fyuren…

You have no reason to refuse even that, right?」

His words indicated his unwillingness to concede any further. Hajime shrugged and responded to Head Secretary Dot.

「Yeah, I don't care. If that pig wants to complain, then I'll make sure to report it to you. I'll keep a more polite means of persuasion in mind.」

Hajime presented his Status Plate to Dot who looked at him in amazement.

「As for where we're going, we haven't decided yet… please ask that guide. We'll likely stay at a hotel she recommends.」 Hajime looked at Riche. Her shoulders dropped, clearly a sign of

resignation.

「Yes, I see… So you're a "Blue." And you managed to fight off a "Black"… How about their Status Plates?」

Dot was surprised to see Hajime was a "Blue" adventurer from what was displayed on his Status Plate. Knowing that the two women with him knocked down Regnid, he requested their Status Plates as well.

「No, Yue and Shea… they lost their Status Plates… and we haven't gotten them reissued yet. Right?」

Hajime told a light lie. Though it would not be odd given the abnormal strength they showed, he wanted to avoid people having a clear grasp of their abilities.

「Still, you must clarify your identity. We keep a record of frequent troublemakers, especially if you keep causing problems. Or will you pay for all guild-related problems you have?」

From Dot's tone of voice, some means of verifying identity was required by all means.

However, if a Status Plate was made, their unique magic would be visible before they could be concealed. Right now, magic from the Age of the Gods would be displayed; it would become troublesome. Though Hajime needed only mow them down, that commotion would cause more trouble in the future.

While Hajime was thinking through things in the back of his head, Yue spoke to Hajime, as if reading his mind.

「… Hajime, letter.」「?? Ah, that letter…」

Like Yue said, when they left the town of Brook, Hajime was given a letter from Catherine. She said it might be useful if he got in trouble with a guild. It was time to see how right she was.

He would leave the city depending on the situation, so Hajime took the letter from his breast pocket and handed it to Dot. Since he was hardly paying attention to Catherine, he did not know the content. Hajime regretted not knowing it a little bit.

「Though I don't know if this will be enough to act as a substitute, an acquaintance of mine from the guild told me to pass this on if I get in trouble.」

「Hm? An acquaintance from the guild? Let me see…」

From the quality of Hajime and the others' clothes, as well as his attitude, it did not seem as if Hajime was troubled for money. Dot looked at him dubiously and opened the letter. He read the contents of the letter with a surprised face.

While reading the letter, he looked between it and the faces of Hajime and the girls. He was trying to see if the letter was a fake.

Before long, he folded the letter and returned it to the envelope. He looked at Hajime.

「I wish to determine if the contents of this letter are true… I cannot judge by myself with just this letter. Could you wait in the other room for now? It should not take more than 15 minutes.」

「Seriously, who is Catherine?」 Hajime thought seeing Dot's unexpected reaction.

「Well, that's fine. I get it, I'll wait.」

「Please allow the staff to guide you. Excuse me.」

Dot called for a staff member, instructing them to guide the three to another room, and quickly disappeared deeper into the guild. The staff member urged Hajime on and guided them. A confused voice called out.

「Um~ What about me?」

It was Riche. She was trying to escape from the guild. She wanted to get away from Hajime, a seed for trouble, as quickly as possible.

Hajime nodded and answered frankly.

「Wait a bit… you won't run, right? You're a pro, aren't you?」
「… Yes.」

Riche drooped her shoulders as they entered deeper. It was a pitiful emotion, like a proper member of society being forced to do back-

alley jobs.

Hajime was guided to the reception room; after some time, a knock on the door was heard. The door was opened, and what appeared was a blond man with swept-back hair. The man accompanied by Dot was in his 30s.

「A pleasure to meet you. I am the head of the Fyuren Branch Adventurer Guild, Iruwa Chang. You are Hajime-kun, Yue-kun, and Shea-kun… correct?」

After a concise self -introduction, Iruwa, the head of the branch, requested they confirm their identities as he requested a handshake. Hajime returned the handshake.

「Yeah, no problem. So, what's with the letter?」

「Right, It was a letter written by Sensei. She seems to like you quite a bit … she was observing you keenly. You have a promising future, but you have a constitution which attracts trouble. She wanted me to look kindly upon you if possible.」

「Constitution which attracts trouble… Certainly, this is just a continuation of the stuff that happened in Brook. Well, is that satisfactory enough for identification?」

「Yeah, it's fine since Sensei wrote it. She purposely described your appearance. I can guarantee your identity with this.」

Catherine's letter was useful. There was a deep trust in her, since he called her "Sensei." Shea, who sat next to Hajime, had especially taken to Catherine, so she was anxious and timidly questioned Iruwa.

「Um～ Who is Catherine-san?」

「Hm? You didn't hear from her? She was the head secretary of the headquarters in the Royal Capital. She began training others in guild management. Currently, the five branch heads, are people who were once under her care.」

Hearing of Catherine's true nature which went beyond his imagination, Hajime was startled. Iruwa smiled bitterly seeing this and continued.

「She was kind, beautiful, and had a wonderful character, so she was our Madonna, an elder sister we yearned for. Afterward, she married and transferred to the guild branch in Brook. She announced her marriage like a bolt from the blue, surprising us all, to say nothing of Headquarters itself.」

「Haa～ She's really amazing～」 「… Catherine, amazing.」

「I thought she was a normal person… but she was someone like that. Actually, to think she was this popular… and now… no, I'll stop.」

Hajime admired Catherine. It seemed she was an important person for quite a long time. Hajime looked in the distance, thinking about the cruelty of time.

「Well, if we're done here, can I go?」

Since they only wanted to confirm his identity, their business should have been done. Hajime was checking with Iruwa; however, he stopped them. Hajime had an unpleasant feeling.

Iruwa signaled Dot who stood next to him. Dot presented a written request to the three.

「Actually, in light of your skill, I would like to request something of you.」

「I refuse.」

The moment Iruwa proposed his request, Hajime tried to decline and stood from his seat. Though Yue and Shea began standing, they stopped moving hearing Iruwa's words.

「I see. Won't you at least listen? It shouldn't hurt just to hear it.」
「…」

Needless to say, even listening to the story would be troublesome.

Still, they did not accuse Hajime of any crime for attacking Pum. Even with the testimony of the bystanders, they skipped the standard procedure of listening to both sides before making a fair judgment, saving them much time.

Needless to say, if they followed the appropriate formalities, it would have taken hours. Looking at it another way, if he ran away

from this, he could easily be placed on the blacklist, which would only cause problems in the future.

Hajime stared at Iruwa for a time. Since he did not say, “Please accept my request,” but, “Please listen to my story,” Hajime decided to think it over and sat down.

「Thanks for listening.」

「… Really, you have a good head, as expected of the head of the branch of a large city.」

「I think quite a bit of you. Well, the contents of the request are written there. This is a search for a missing person. He did not return, even though many adventurers were sent to investigate the mountains to the north. There is only one person missing from any reports. 」

Iruwa summarized the story.

Recently, a gathering of demons in the 【Northern Mountain Range】was seen, so he sent people to investigate. Since strong demons appeared even only one mountain away, only high-ranking adventurers were sent, though the demons were not as strong as those in a Great Labyrinth. Still, the group was gathered somewhat forcibly before being sent off.

The person in question was Will Kudeta, the third son of Earl Kudeta. The man wanted to become an adventurer and left on this investigation. The contact sent out to secretly follow him stated that the man’s whereabouts were currently unknown.

「The Earl put all his resources to search, and he filed a missing persons report to the guild. The group sent on the investigation was made of adventurers with remarkable skill, so anyone sent out now will likely be of average skill. We need someone better to undertake this task, but no one meets that criteria. Then you came. Please, accept this request.」

「You talk about ability, but aren't I just a "Blue?" That's quite unfortunate, isn't it?」

Hajime spoke flatly to Iruwa who was struggling to express his own emotions.

「Didn't you just take out the "Black" Regnid a moment ago? And I don't know if there's anyone more suitable than someone who went through Raisen Gorge, right?」

「! So you know… was it the letter? But I never told her…」
Hajime's travels through 【Raisen Gorge】 were told to no one. It

was impossible for Iruwa to know through that letter. However, he began wondering if Catherine actually knew and turned his head. Shea timidly raised her hand.

Hajime looked suspiciously at her. 「What is it, Shea?」

「Um, when we got into talking… Te he?」 「… Punishment, later.」

「!? Yu, Yue-san was there, too!」「… Shea, traitor.」

「Punishment for both of you!」

Apparently Yue and Shea were in on it together. The two had a cold sweat as Hajime declared they would be punished. Smiling bitterly, Iruwa continued speaking.

「Though it's not likely he survived, the possibility isn't zero. The Earl is a personal friend of mine, and I want to have this search done as quickly as possible. Please. You are the only one. Will you do this?」

Iruwa, who was begging him, was thinking of this as more than just a guild request. The Earl was his friend, so, naturally, Will may have been an acquaintance. He was personally anxious about the man's safety.

「I see, but we also have our own journey to go on. We aren't going near the north, so please allow me to refuse.」

Hajime declined without hesitating; however, as if foreseeing this, Iruwa made a proposal before Hajime could stand.

「Please allow me to change the reward? Though I can increase your pay, I can make it a little more attractive. With your ability, I will promote you straight to "Black" rank.」

「No, I'm fine with the money as it is. The rank doesn't matter to me, either…」

「Then, in the future, whenever trouble occurs with the guild, how about I support you to the best of my abilities? You can have pride knowing that you have the support of the head of the Fyuren Branch, right? For someone like you who gets into trouble a lot, isn't this a good reward?」

「That's quite a generous reward. Isn't this a bit too much for a friend's son?」

Hearing Hajime's words, Iruwa's expression fell for the first time. He was full of regret.

「Not really… I was the one who recommended the job to Will. I was also the one who made the investigation request. Even if I called it an investigation, I gathered strength I thought would be satisfactory. Will is a noble and unsuited to being an adventurer, despite wanting to be one for such a long time. For that reason, I sent strong people with him; however, it was too difficult a task… That is why I wanted to do this, for old times sake…」

While hearing Iruwa talk to himself, Hajime sunk deep into thought. The connection between Iruwa and Will was far stronger than he expected. Though Iruwa spoke with a clear expression, he likely wanted to do anything he possibly could. The man's odds of survival quickly approached zero as time passed. For this reason, he proposed an unreasonable reward, this was the largest evidence of his haste.

Hajime, too, needed to make an excuse for Yue and Shea every time they reached a new town. He could conveniently use this town.

Furthermore, if he got into trouble with the Kingdom or the Saint Church, this connection would serve him in a good way.

If the head of a guild branch in a large city supported him, he could more easily escape any time some inconvenience passed him by. Furthermore, if the man was alive, Iruwa's gratitude would last a long time.

「If you're willing to go that far, I will accept… with two conditions.」

「Conditions?」

「Yeah. They aren't too difficult. I want you to make a Status Plate for Yue and Shea. You must promise to never reveal what you see on them, either. Also, regardless of what happens, I want you to use all guild connections you have to help us out.」

「That much…」

「If you can't do it, then we're done here. Please allow me to leave.」

As Hajime stood from his seat, Iruwa and Dot had faces full of impatience and anxiety. To allow the head of a guild branch to fall under the thumb of a single adventurer was not something he could allow at a moment's notice.

「Those are your demands?」

「You're giving in too easily. Aren't they unreasonable? Anyway, our existences are a bit peculiar, so we'll likely be marked by the Church… No, we'll definitely be marked by them soon. At that time, I just want you to be my ally. Even if a warrant for our capture is released, I want to be able to use your facilities…」

「You're sure you'll be on the wanted list? Hm, I'm personally anxious about your secrets. Though I know you're not a bad man from Catherine- sensei's letter… you and Shea have tremendous physical strength, and I heard Yue practiced never before seen magic… Does that have to do with your secret…? And to say the Church will be after you… Since you can't really hide yourself, as for what happens afterward … you won't be able to move easily… so that's why you want this…」

As expected of the head of a guild branch in a large city. His mind worked quickly. After thinking a while, Iruwa matched Hajime's gaze.

「I cannot simply satisfy those demands since I will have no part in assisting you in a crime. Every time you make a demand, I will hear the details personally and judge them. However, I promise to be your ally as much as I possibly can… I cannot go any further. How about that?」

「Well, it is a big issue… but that's fine. We'll grab the reward after finishing this request. Did the greenhorn take anything with him before he left?」

Hajime's main purpose was to obtain a Status Plate for Yue and Shea. Not having one to present was unnatural in this world, and it would be troublesome to keep making excuses in the future.

The main problem was how to make sure the creator of the Status Plate did not reveal anything. Iruwa's existence solved that problem.

However, even if he made a verbal promise, he still had doubts. Sooner or later, Hajime's uniqueness would come to light. This would make it difficult for him to move. For that reason, Hajime came to those demands after determining Iruwa was likely having his heart tormented by this problem.

Iruwa likely guessed Hajime's intention. He smiled bitterly, finally relieved to hear Hajime accept.

「Really, I'm anxious about your secrets… but I look forward to your success. Hajime-kun, I cannot tell you what form you will find Will in… Hajime-kun, Yue-kun, Shea-kun… Please do this for me.」

Iruwa bowed slowly after earnestly looking at them. The head of a guild branch bowing to a single adventurer. That was not normally possible, especially for someone who was a former student of Catherine, full of merit in the public eye.

Seeing this, Hajime stood up and spoke lightly. 「Got it.」

「… Mm.」「Yes.」

Afterward, Hajime received a letter of recommendation, the investigation results, information on the adventurers who took the original mission, and instructions to head to a lakeside town at the foot of 【The Northern Mountain Range.】

Hajime left the room and shut the door. 「Fuu～」Iruwa looked at the door for a while and sighed loudly. While alone in the room, Dot spoke out to Iruwa.

「Head… is this all right? That reward…」

「… Will's life is in the balance. I have no one else I can ask. It can't be helped. I knew I needed to do anything to get their help. It's fine. Also, their secret…」

「It would be "inconvenient" to have their Status Plate revealed…」

「Yes. Dot-kun. Did you know? All the Heroes from the Hairihi Kingdom had unexpected statuses?」

Dot opened his eyes widely.

「! Head, you think he is a summoned person… One of "God's Apostles?" But it sounded like he was opposing the Church. Would the Saint Church really allow someone like that to be amongst the Heroes?」

「Yes, exactly. But… 4 months ago, one person died in Orcus. He fell into the Abyss with a demon.」

「… It can't be, he was alive? And 4 months ago, the Heroes were still weak back then, right? How could he possibly survive in the depths of Orcus…」

Dot shook his neck in disbelief, denying Iruwa's words; however, Iruwa continued watching the door in interest.

「That's right. But, if that's true… why does he not rejoin his companions and instead travels on his own? What did he find in the depths?」

「What… could it be…」

「Yes. Surely, he is prepared to fight the Church. He is prepared to make the entire world his enemy.」

「The world…」

「I, I wish to have a connection with this odd man by all means, even if he is chased by the Kingdom and the Church. I'm sure Sensei understood this, this is probably why she gave him that letter.」

「Head… Are you sure you're not mistaken?」 「Of course.」

Despite being dizzy from the scale of the story, Dot did not forget his place as the Head Secretary and advised Iruwa. However, Iruwa continued looking on absent-mindedly.

There was a road leading across the vast plains to the north. Even if it was called a highway, it was simply a path where the

weeds were flattened due to the numerous travelers, creating a road. Since the wagons in this world had no suspension, those riding surely felt every bump, leading to a need to relax their rears upon reaching their destination.

Along that road, a shadow passed at an impossible speed, ignoring the irregularities of the road. It was painted black and had two wheels. The shadow of three people sat on it.

Hajime, Yue, and Shea. They flew down the road at a speed far beyond what they traveled at the base of Raisen Gorge. They were going more than 80 kilometers per hour. Since there was nothing that could obstruct their magic, Hajime could fully utilize the specs of the magically driven two wheeled vehicle, Stiefe.

As always, Yue sat in Hajime's arms while Shea was pressed up against his back. Her rabbit ears waved about in the wind.

The warm sunlight poured down on them. Since the wind pressure was adjusted by Yue's magic, it could be called ideal touring weather. In all actuality, Yue and Shea had their eyes half closed in pleasure as they basked in the sunlight and felt the comfort of the wind.

「Hauu～ It feels so good～ Yue-san～ Let's change places on the way back～」

「… No. This is my place.」

「Eh～ Don't be like that～ His back feels good, too, doesn't it? 」
Shea's words were slow as she tried to exchange places with Yue.

Yue looked at Shea's loose face hanging over Hajime's shoulder. Hajime, with an annoyed expression, answered in place of Yue.

「Listen, isn't it impossible for you to sit in front? You'd get in the way. Especially those rabbit ears. They'd wave in the wind and hit my eyes.」

「Ah～ That's right～」

「… No good, she's almost asleep.」

Apparently, Shea was half-asleep already. Her weight was fully on him, and it seemed she was simply talking with the last of her energy.

「Well, at this pace, we'll get there at the end of day, so we can get some rest then.」

According to Hajime's words, the town they were going to was within range of the mountain where Will was sent to investigate. Normally they would not have the time to rest, but they would reach the town by daybreak, so they could begin their search the next day when the sun rose.

The longer they waited, the less likely it was for Will to survive.

Still, Yue looked curiously up at Hajime.

Hajime returned a bitter smile to Yue who looked cutely up at him from below.

「… You sure about this?」

「Yeah. I hope he's alive. We'll have to deal with plenty of trouble from the Church and the Kingdom, so it's best we make our shields as strong as possible, right? That man's straight-laced, too.」

「… I see.」

Though he could not tell how effective Iruwa would be as a shield, the more insurance he had, the better. Furthermore, if he could get more favors from doing a little bit more hard work, there was nothing to regret.

「I heard before, too. This town ahead of us is by a lakeside, and it's got rich soil. I heard they even have rice farms.」

「… Rice farms?」

「Yeah, rice. In a word, it's a staple food in my home world. I haven't eaten it since I got here. I don't know if it's the same, but I want to hurry and try it.」

「… Yeah. I want to eat, too… What's the town's name?」 Yue looked at Hajime who was looking to the distance,

reminiscing as he drove. He was embarrassed when he noticed Yue staring at him. He responded in a loud voice to cover up.

「The Lake Town, Ul.」

「Haa, no clues today… Shimuzu-kun, where in the world did you go?」

Hatayama Aiko, the teacher who was summoned with the students, walked down the main street in 【Ul】with her shoulders drooped dejectedly. Her typically cheerful appearance was gone. She was filled with worry and dread. The brilliant streetlights appeared gloomier than usual.

「Aiko, don't mind it too much. We don't know anything yet. There's the possibility he's safe. You need to believe.」

「That's right, Ai-chan Sensei. Shimizu-kun's room wasn't a mess, either. There's the possibility he went somewhere. Don't just think of the worst.」

To Aiko, who was low spirited, David, the commander of Aiko's exclusive guard, and the student, Sonobe Yuuka, gave solace.

It had been 2 weeks since one of their classmates, Yukitoshi Shimizu, disappeared. Though they left no stone unturned, they could not find any sign of him. He was not seen in the entire town or in the surrounding villages.

At first, things were noisy, since Shimizu was known to have a special talent for “Dark Magic;” they thought some kind of incident had occurred despite his room not being ruined.

However, lately, many people thought he left on his own. Originally, Shimizu was not a social person, nor was he an indoor

type. He was not particularly close with any of his classmates, but, surprisingly, he joined the Ai-chan Escort.

Under those circumstances, some of the other students were anxious about Aiko who had lost her energy while thinking about Shimizu’s safety. The Escort was as well, needless to say.

By the way, it was reported to the Kingdom and the Church who seemed to be organizing search parties. Shimizu, too, was a person summoned who had a talent for magic. Unlike with Hajime, they were not keen on losing him. Still, it would be another 2, 3 days until the search teams arrived.

With words of consideration being piled upon her, Aiko felt like hitting herself. No matter how much she worried, nothing would change, and he may have left on his own.

Regardless, she had students by her side and was their teacher. Aiko hit her cheeks with both hands, took a deep breath, and reorganized her thoughts.

「Everyone, I'm sorry for worrying you. You're right, nothing will change if I just worry. Shimizu-kun is an excellent magic user. I'm sure he's safe. Right now, we need to think about dinner. Let's fill our stomachs and prepare for tomorrow.」

The people around her cried out, 「Yes～」. The knights also looked happy with the situation.

Karan, Karan. The hotel door made this sound as Aiko and the others entered. It was the best hotel in 【The town of Ul】. Its name was "Water Fairy Hotel." Supposedly, a married couple took in a fairy from 【Uldeia Lake.】

【Uldeia Lake】was the largest lake on the continent and was about four times the size of Lake Biwa in Japan.

The first floor of "Water Fairy Hotel" was a restaurant, and it had a number of dishes which were special products of Ul. Inside, it was calm with tables and a bar with many fine decorations. There was a chandelier hanging from the ceiling and the scent of flowers in the air.

This place was by all means an "established business" — it gave off the air of a place full of history.

At first, Aiko wanted to go to another hotel, since she could not settle down in a high-class place like this, but it was impossible as Aiko was the "Goddess of Fertility" and her students were "God's Apostles." After some persuasion by the knights, they happily stayed here.

They sat at VIP seats, and the interior was for their exclusive use. They enjoyed dinner that day.

「Ahh, I didn't think I would be able to enjoy such wonderful curry since this is a different world～」

「Well, it looks more like a stew… No, a white curry, right?」 Yuuka praised the hotel dishes with a musical tone while Atsushi

ordered the other world version of curry, consenting with what was in his memory. On the other hand, Noboruate a bowl of rice with various deep-fried foods, pointing at things with his chopsticks in bad manners.

「No, it's like a tempura bowl, right? Isn't this pretty rare? It beats Japan in that sense, right?」

「Are you sure you can taste properly, Tamai-kun? Don't you dare compare tempura to this.」

「I can't get enough of this chahan- like stuff, it's the best.」
「There's even a gyoza-like item on the menu. The person who

opened this shop definitely is Japanese.」

The students were energetic being able to eat home world dishes every night.

Though there were differences between the appearance and taste, the creation of the dishes themselves were similar. The materials were of good quality, too, so they were high quality dishes of 【Ul.】To say nothing of the rice, they could catch fish from 【Uldeia Lake,】and there were herbs and spices in the mountains, too.

A man nearing his 60s with a large mustache approached while watching Aiko and the others bite into the delicious dishes.

「Everyone, how is the meal today? If there is something you wish for, please do not hesitate to tell me.」

「Ah, Owner-san.」

As Aiko said, the man, Voss, was the owner of “Water Fairy Hotel.” He had a straight line to his back, and his eyes were calm. His gray hair swept down.

He was a man whose atmosphere truly suited the hotel.

「It’s very delicious today as well. Every day, we feel energized.」 Aiko smiled and responded as representative of the group. Voss

was also happy to hear it.

However, a second later, his expression clouded in apology. It was unbecoming of Voss who always smiled calmly. Everyone stopped eating and looked at him.

「Actually, I must apologize… The dish was created using fewer spices today.」

「Eh!? We won't be able to eat nishilshur (The other world's version of curry) again?」

Because curry was her favorite food, Sonobe Yuuka asked in shock.

「Yes. I'm sorry. Truthfully, we are lacking materials… We have some in stock… but the materials collected from the mountains have significantly decreased this month. A few days ago, many high-ranking adventurers came to investigate, and they went missing. I don't know what will happen or when the next shipment of goods will come in.」

「Um… What do you mean, concretely?」

「A crowd of demons was seen… So long as they don't cross the mountains, this place is safe. There are strong demons there, and even if they cross, they rarely come here, but a crowd has been spotted recently.」

「That's, I'm worried…」

Aiko frowned. The others looked at one another seriously as well. Voss apologized and said ,「This isn't something to talk about during a meal.」He kept his tone as brightly as he could to help recover the atmosphere.

「But something might happen soon.」「What do you mean?」

「Actually, a new guest will arrive soon. It seems he will come to search for the other adventurers. He was nominated by the head of the Fyuren Branch of the Adventurer Guild. He seems to have quite a bit of influence. He is probably here to find out what happened.」

Though it did not seem like Aiko and the students realized what was going on right away, David, one of the guard knights, raised a voice half in interest and half in admiration.

If he was recruited by the head of the Fyuren Branch, then he was considered amongst the best in the guild. He must be quite strong. As someone who fought, he ran through the famous “Gold” adventurers in his mind.

At that time, Aiko and the others heard a voice from the stairs which led to the second floor. There was a man’s voice and two girls’ voices. It seemed one of the girls was complaining to the man. Voss reacted to it.

「Oh, odd. I heard they would arrive tomorrow. I guess you can speak to them, since they arrived already.」

「I see, got it. But that voice is quite young, was there anyone that young amongst the “Gold?”」

The knight, David, ran through the “Gold” in his brain. He was confused, since none were quite so young.

While he was thinking, a group of three, a man and two women, seemed to get closer.

Aiko and the others sat inside the building and were separated by a rail. They could look out over the entire shop. In short, they were in a private room closed off with a curtain. Aiko, the “Goddess of Fertility,” often closed the curtain since people always peered at her while she ate. Today, too, the curtain was closed.

Through the curtain, they heard the man and women converse.
「Honestly, how many times must I say it? Stop entering a world with Yue-san and ignoring me. It’s so lonely. Do you hear me?

“Hajime”-san.」

「I heard you, I heard you. Honestly, I’ll kick you out and put you in another room if you keep annoying me.」

「Ahh! Did you hear this? Yue-san, “Hajime”-san is being so cold!」

「… “Hajime”… Meh!」 「Yeah, yeah.」

Hearing the content of the conversation and the name the girls’ voices called, Aiko’s heart was jumping up and down.

What did they just say? What did they call the boy? That boy’s voice, wasn’t is similar to “That boy’s?”

All doubts were buried in Aiko’s mind. Her body was stiff, as if tied down; her gaze was focused, as if she could see through the curtain.

Their lives had been saved, and the event had a deep impact which had sent Yuuka's mind into shock. She did not have the will to even make a sound, she simply was stunned.

For Atsushi and the others, "He" had disappeared into the Abyss 4 months ago. "He" would no longer come to the surface. Everyone recognized this boy as "death in the other world." This boy was someone they wanted to remove from their memories. For better or for worse…

Voss looked at Aiko and Yuuka, as well as the other students who were clearly abnormal, curiously. None of them reacted. Suddenly, Aiko spoke a name.

「… Nagumo-kun?」

Her body froze as she unconsciously called out his name. Aiko stood up, flinging the chair aside, and thrust the curtain aside with enough strength to tear it down.

Shaa!! Hearing the unexpected sound of the curtain being pulled, the boy and girls stopped moving in surprise.

Aiko did not think to confirm who he was, she simply shouted. She shouted the name of her important former student.

「Nagumo-kun!」

「Ahh? …… Sensei?」

In Aiko's presence was a boy with one eye wide open, he had white hair and an eye patch.

His face was vastly different from the Nagumo Hajime in her memory. Not only that, his atmosphere was drastically different. He always had a quiet character and acted maturely, that was the Nagumo Hajime Aiko knew. In fact, Aiko secretly felt the boy's bitter smile suited him especially well.

But the boy before her was like a hawk with a sharp gaze and a keen atmosphere that would not easily allow others to approach. He was so different, she would not recognize him if they simply walked past each other in town.

But his features and voice matched the person in her memories. Above all… He said it himself. “Sensei.”

Aiko was convinced. Though his face and his atmosphere changed greatly, the boy in her presence was certainly her student, “Nagumo Hajime!”

「Nagumo-kun… It really is Nagumo-kun? You’re alive… Really, you’re alive…」

「No, you’re mistaken. Excuse me.」 「Eh? 」

Reuniting with a student she thought was dead was a miracle. She was on the verge of tears. Where were you? What were you doing? What happened to you? There were so many things she wanted to ask. Still, while Aiko was desperately trying to think of the words to say, something unexpected was said to her.

She instinctively let out a dull noise. Aiko’s tears disappeared. Before she noticed, Hajime was walking toward the exit. Her mind returned to normal and she ran after him in a panic.

「Wait a minute! You’re Nagumo-kun, aren’t you? You called me Sensei, right? Why did you say that?」

「No, you misheard. That was… right, I said “Shorty.” It was just my dialect, yeah.」

「How rude! Rather, there’s no dialect like that. Are you trying to trick me? What happened to you…? Why are you here? Why didn’t you return right away? Nagumo-kun, answer me! You won’t deceive me!」

Aiko’s anger extended to the entire restaurant.

Many of the guests caught sight of the “Goddess of Fertility” yelling at a man. Their eyes were sparkling in curiosity at this pleasant misunderstanding.

The students and the knights came afterward from within.

The students, seeing Hajime’s appearance, were astonished. Half was because he was alive, while half was from his massive change. Still, they did not know what was going on and simply watched Aiko and Hajime.

On the other hand, while Hajime looked calm, he was slightly panicking in his mind.

In this town he traveled to at the request of the head of the guild branch he became acquainted to by chance, he met with Aiko and his classmates; he never imagined it possible, even in a dream.

Due to this surprise, he inadvertently muttered “Sensei.” In the end, he would not be able to deceive her. Toward the angry questions

that Aiko asked in waves, he only had a few cards to play, such as “run away,” “carry through with this mistaken identity,” “become a suspicious foreigner,” and “explain everything to Ai-chan.” No matter what, he could not see what would happen.

He was with his reliable partners, too. Of course, they were the Blood Sucking Princess and a shameless rabbit-eared girl. While looking at him, Yue shook off Aiko’s hand which was tightly grasping his arm, causing the guards to grow restless.

「… Let go, you’re troubling Hajime.」

「Wh, what was that, who are you? Right now, Nagumo-kun and I are having an important conversation…」

「… Then settle down.」

Aiko flinched from the beautiful girl who gazed at her with cold eyes. Their height was not that different, making this look like a children’s argument.

But Yue was overflowing with a fascinating atmosphere while Aiko seemed younger than her true age. As such, it looked like an adult (Yue) scolding a child (Aiko).

Aiko stepped back, recognizing her reckless words, blushed, and looked at Hajime with the dignity of an adult… while standing on her tip toes.

「Excuse me, I was flustered. Nagumo- kun, it’s you, right?」 This time, she quietly, with conviction, spoke, matching Hajime’s

gaze straight on.

Seeing this, Hajime was convinced he would not be able to run away or deceive her. After scratching his head, he sighed.

「Yeah. It's been a while, Sensei.」

「It really is, it really is you, Nagumo-kun… You were alive…」
Hajime shrugged without showing signs of any deep emotion

while Aiko was on the verge of tears again.

「Something like that. Though there were a lot of things that happened, I managed to survive.」

「Thank goodness, really, thank goodness.」

After glancing at Aiko who was having trouble speaking again, Hajime sat at a nearby table, followed by Yue and Shea. Shea was confused.

Aiko and the others were bewildered by his sudden actions. Hajime had completely gone back to normal, ignoring his surroundings as usual, while Voss watched from behind the students.

「Umm, Hajime-san. Is this okay? They're your acquaintances, right? And… from the other world…」

「It's fine like this. I was surprised to see them, but, well, we came to eat, so let's hurry up and order. I really want to enjoy this meal, okay? It's curry, got it? No, I guess it's a spicy rice dish called nishilshur. I'd be happy if it tastes like I'm imagining it does.」

「… Then I'll have it, too. Hajime's favorite dish.」

「Ahh, such a casual appeal… How like you, Yue-san. I'll also have it. We'd like to order now～」

At first, Shea timidly glanced at Aiko and the students, but she soon called out to Voss to order. Hajime was smiling wryly.

They acted as normal. Aiko, once again standing in blank surprise, returned to normal seeing Hajime order a meal naturally. When she approached the table, she said 「Sensei is angry.」 and she hit the table with an easily read expression.

「Nagumo-kun, I haven't finished talking to you yet. Why are you ordering food so naturally? Actually, who are these girls here?」

Aiko's complaints held the feelings of all the knights present who had guessed from the conversation that Hajime was the student who died 4 months ago. The students behind Aiko, too, were nodding. They all waited for Hajime's answer.

Yuuka and the others all swallowed their saliva anxiously, taking a posture of waiting for Hajime's answer.

Hajime frowned as if it were troublesome and began eating naturally while calmly thinking. He then reluctantly returned Aiko's glance.

「I came here on a request. Since I'm hungry, I ordered. As for these two…」

Hajime turned to Yue and Shea. The two, before Hajime could speak, introduced themselves in a shocking way.

「… Yue.」「I'm Shea.」

「… Hajime's woman.」「Hajime-san's woman.」「W, woman?」

「Eh? Eh?」Aiko stammered while looking at Hajime and the two beauties in turn. She was not able to process the information well.

「Ehh!?」Nana and Taeko screamed behind Aiko as they looked between Yue and Shea alternatively while the Atsushi formation fell over in a large pile as if seeing the impossible. Bishiri, Yuuka's mind seemed to freeze, sound effect included.

「Hey, Yue aside, Shea, aren't you different?」

「No way! That's mean, Hajime- san. You took my first kiss!」

「No, at that time, that was just —」

「Nagumo kun?」

「… What, Sensei?」

Hearing “took my first kiss” from Shea, Aiko’s ability to process information caught up, and she called out in a low voice.

In Aiko’s mind, she saw Hajime with two beautiful girls, one in each hand, laughing loudly. Her expression clearly said that.

Aiko blushed and ignored Hajime’s words. She was determined to correct any misconduct, no matter the cost. “Sensei’s anger” was like a large thunderbolt hitting the high-level hotel in Ul.

「To take a girl’s first kiss, how dirty! Did you not come back right away because you were playing around? I won’t forgive you if that was the case. Yes, I won’t allow it! Time for a lecture, Nagumo-kun!」

Hajime sighed deeply as he accepted Aiko’s contemptuous gaze.

After Aiko yelled, the guests were all gazing at her, so she guided Hajime to the VIP seating.

Though Aiko, Sonobe Yuuka, and the other students were angrily questioning him, Hajime quickly brushed their questions aside and returned to his nilshishur (The other world curry.)

1. After you fell from the bridge, what did you do? A. I super

worked hard.
2. Why do you have white hair?
3. It's the result of super working hard. Q. What happened to your eye?

1. It's the result of super working hard. Q. Why didn't you return immediately? A. I had no reason to return.

Hearing this, Aiko pouted and yelled, 「Answer me seriously!」 though with her cheeks puffed out, she had little force to her words.

To say the least, Hajime did not look at her and continued enjoying his meal with Yue and Shea. They seemed happy with the meal.

David, the leader of Aiko's exclusive escort, lost his temper. He was unable to endure the woman he loved being ignored, and hit the table while screaming.

「Hey, you! Answer Aiko's questions! Answer them seriously!」 Hajime let out a sigh as he looked at David.

「I'm eating, aren't I? You really need to learn some manners.」 David was a prideful man. He had no equal amongst the knights with him, and he was made the leader of such an important

person's escort.

Naturally, he turned red hearing Hajime's blunt response and

looked at Shea.

「Hmph, manners? That's a laugh. I should say that to you. To think a dirty beast would be sitting at the same table as a human. You need to learn some propriety. Why don't you chop off those ugly ears of hers. She'll be a bit more human then.」

Shea's body stiffened being looked at with such contempt. In 【Brook,】her first meeting was with Catherine who she

became intimate with; Hajime was also there. There were many friendly people. Even in 【Fyuren,】though there were many terrible gazes, no one had verbally spoken to her like a slave.

In other words, this was the first time since she began traveling with Hajime that she had heard such discriminatory words. Though she was clear how people would act to her and did not want to worry about it, she was hit in an unexpected place. Shea looked down.

It was not just David, Chase and the other knights were looking at Shea like that as well. Even if they were close to Aiko, they were temple knights and royal guards, people close to the center of the Saint Church and the Kingdom. Namely, their discrimination was strong. After all, the Saint Church and the Kingdom were the source of such a sense of values.

Though David and his men were more flexible in their thinking upon meeting Aiko, he had only been with her for a few months, so his deeply ingrained values were not significantly changed.

Aiko began cautioning him for his excessive use of language on instinct, but Yue had clasped Shea's hand and returned a cold gaze to David.

Her cold gaze, with her beautiful face which was like a high- class bisque doll, made David flinch, but he eventually lost his temper seeing such a young girl look at him like an infant.

Though he typically did not lose his temper so easily, when it came to his beloved Aiko, he was easy to set off.

「What's with those eyes? How terrible! You're not even God's Apostle, and to think you would oppose a temple knight!」

David stood up. Though Chase, the vice commander, tried to stop him, Yue spoke before he could do anything.

「… Small man.」

Her words were derisive. Her tone and her gaze caused the already upset David to lose his temper completely.

He lost all semblance of a reliable man in front of Aiko. 「… You pagan. I will send you to hell with that beast.」

He muttered quietly and grabbed the sword at his side. Seeing a fight brewing, the students stood flustered, while Aiko and Chase

tried to stop it; however, David heard none of their voices and pulled his sword from its sheath.

That moment, Dopan! A dry explosive echoed through the “Water Fairy Hotel.” At the same time, David was thrown aside, as if his head were blown off in an instant.

The back of his head hit the wall, and he crumbled to the floor, the whites of his eyes visible. David’s sword was thrown from his hand and landed on the floor.

Everyone stiffened. They turned to David who fell.

Voss opened the curtain to see what happened and froze seeing his tragic state.

Aiko regained her thoughts once Voss entered. She turned to the source of the explosive sound.

Though Aiko knew of them, she had never seen them, especially in this different world. Obviously, it was foreign to the knights. Hajime sat on his seat with a “gun” in hand.

White smoke rose from Donner. He shot a nonfatal rubber-coated bullet.

The knights inferred that Hajime attacked, but they did not know how. Immediately, they had a desire to fight as they grasped their

sword.

However, they were completely overpowered by a thirst for blood they could not compare to which slammed down on them like an iron hammer from the heavens. The knights were forced to sit down.

Though not necessarily exposed to his killing intent, Aiko and the students went pale and trembled.

Hajime placed Donner on the table with an unnaturally loud sound. He was threatening them. He stood up and clearly made his declaration.

「I'm not interested in you. I want no relation with you, nor do I think you should have a care for me. I will report nothing more in the future. I came here for work, and I will continue my travels once that is done. We part here. We should follow mutual non-intervention. You can do whatever selfish things you want, but don't get in my way. If you show hostility like you did just now… I may accidentally kill you.」

Got it? Hajime's eyes were clearly asking this. No one could object. Chase, who was enduring this pressure the most, slightly nodded.

Hajime looked at Aiko. Aiko had nothing more to say. No, she could say nothing more. Ignoring Hajime's Overpower, Hajime's words clearly showed that her student had changed. Aiko's pride as a teacher could not allow her to neglect this.

Hajime let out a sigh and shrugged as he resolved his “Overpower.” Though Aiko had no response, Hajime sympathized with her feelings. He did not force her to answer, either.

Nana and Taeko were clearly frightened, and Atsushi and the boys were obviously frozen and tense, so he doubted they would dare to bother him. Only Yuuka, rather than frightened, seemed confused and a little sad; Hajime did not particularly worry about it, though.

With the terrifying sense of pressure gone, Chase and the knights let out a deep breath. Aiko, the students, and the knights all sat down in their chairs tired.

Hajime returned to his meal and spoke to Shea.

「Hey, Shea. This is normal on the “outside.” No need to worry about it, okay?」

「Yes, right… I knew that… but really, my ears must be disgusting to humans.」

Shea smiled in self-ridicule while grasping her rabbit ears. Yue looked at her and comforted her.

「… Shea’s rabbit ears are cute.」「Yue-san… Is that so?」

Still, Shea did not have confidence. Hajime was surprised and continued eating. Yue, after saying 「Meh!」and chastising him, he

softly spoke to Shea to comfort her.

「Listen, the Church has been brainwashing the upper echelons of the country. Those guys are well educated, so it's obvious they would be like that. Anyway, isn't the Rabbit Clan desired as slaves? That wouldn't be the case if they thought those ears were disgusting.」

「That's… right… U, Um, by the way, Hajime-san… Um… What do you think… about my ears?」

Guessing that Hajime meant to comfort her with his words, Shea peeked upward. Her ears clearly expressed 「I want to know, I want to know.」 Her ears were twitching in anticipation.

「… I don't mind…」

Hajime answered curtly and looked at his meal to avoid answering. Her ears regrettably dropped.

But Yue followed up, causing them to perk up in an instant.

「…Hajime loves them. When you're asleep, he plays with them.」
「Yue!? You promised not to tell her, didn't you!?」

「Ha, Hajime-san… loves my rabbit ears… E he he.」

Shea held her red cheeks in her hands while her rabbit ears were quickly moving about expressing her pleasure.

The tense atmosphere which made everyone feel like they would be

exterminated with a single mistake was gone, now filled with a mysteriously pink air; Aiko, Yuuka, as well as the other students, were staggered.

Before long, after watching Hajime and the girls' love comedy, Atsushi muttered his thoughts.

「Eh? This is weird. Nagumo was seriously scary earlier, but now…」

「You think so, too, huh? Actually, those two, they're seriously cute… But their flirting is torture.」

「… It's like you said, but what did he do to be so happy with girls from a different world… I want to know! Let's find out! Noboru! Akito!」

「「Go to hell! Noboru! Atsushi!」」

Gu gu gu, they looked at Hajime, who made them shudder just a moment ago, with envy. With the serious atmosphere now gone, the girls returned to normal and looked coldly at the schoolboys.

Chase, realizing things had settled down, took charge of David's recovery. At the same time, he suppressed his own wariness and hostility and spoke to Hajime with a smile. There was something he wanted to hear by all means.

「Nagumo-kun, right? I apologize for the Commander a while ago. We are Aiko-san's guard, so I suppose he was a little too sensitive when it came to her. Still, there is something I want to ask you.」

Hajime wanted to ask if he was so oversensitive that he would kill, but he remained silent and just waved his hand.

This attitude caused Chase to frown for a moment, but his poker face did not collapse. Chase was unable to neglect the artifacts Hajime held.

「That's an artifact… right? Though I don't have much knowledge about them, that seems to be strong. It's stronger than a bow, and I didn't hear an aria for magic. Where did you get it?」

Though he smiled, his eyes were not laughing. Since there was no sign that magic was used, it would be possible to mass-produce the weapon which followed the laws of physics. It could influence the war to come. Even so, he did not think Hajime would answer.

Hajime looked at Chase. He tried to say something, but was interrupted by the excited Tamai Atsushi.

「Th, that's right, Nagumo, that's a gun, right!? Where did you get it!」

Chase reacted to Tamai's shout.

「Gun? Do you know something about it, Tamai?」

「Eh? Ah, yeah. It's a weapon from our world.」

Chase's eyes, which were looking at Tamai, slowly returned to Hajime.

「Hmm, in other words, it is an artifact that did not originally exist in this world… Then the one to make it must be from a different world… Naturally, the creator…」

「Is me.」

Hajime naturally said he created it. Chase was surprised, since he thought Hajime was a secretive person.

「You admitted it so easily. Nagumo-kun, you understand the meaning behind this weapon? Then…」

「It could completely change the circumstances of this world…

right? If it could be mass produced. So you want me to return or at least teach you how to make it, right? Naturally, I reject it all. Give up.」

Hajime's words left him utterly helpless. He had the words taken from his mouth. However, Chase continued, since the gun was so attractive.

「But if it can be mass produced, weaker soldiers can be extremely powerful. If you do this, many people could use it in the upcoming

war, and our chances for victory would go up a lot, too. You should cooperate, to help your teacher and friends, right? Then… 」

「 No matter what you say, I won't help you. If you want to take it from me, then I will consider you an enemy. At that time… you need to be prepared to die before the war. 」

Chase's body was overcome with a cold chill that accompanied Hajime's quiet words. Aiko interrupted there.

「 Chase-san. Nagumo-kun has his own values. Please don't force anything on my student. Nagumo-kun, too, please stop speaking so violently. Also… Nagumo-kun, do you really intend to not return? 」

「 Yeah. I have no desire to. Tomorrow morning, I'll do my job and leave here immediately. 」

「 Why… 」

Aiko looked sadly at Hajime. Though she tried to hear his reasons, Hajime stood up first. Before she was aware, Yue and Shea had finished eating. Though Aiko tried to stop them, Hajime ignored her and climbed the stairs to the second floor.

With Aiko and the others left behind, an unnatural air flowed. 「 … You really are alive. 」

Though small, she confirmed the fact with her words, breaking the silence. Everyone turned around and saw Yuuka stare at the stairs, her expression filled with various emotions.

「It's like Kaori-chan said. Well, far from asking for help, it seems he did it himself.」

「Yuukachi… are you okay?」「Yuuka…」

Seeing Yuuka speak to her self, Nana and Taeko called to her anxiously. Yuuka shrugged her shoulders in response to the two as she smiled wryly.

「I'm fine… well, that was a surprise, but it's not like it's a problem? Our classmate's alive, right? "That's good," I was just thinking.」

「… Yeah, that's right! I can't believe it yet, but still. It's hard to tell, isn't it? He's a completely different person!」

「Certainly. How should I put it… um, what is it… wild? Or something like that.」

Taeko chose her words, unable to say she felt like she had encountered a horrific killer.

At this time, Atsushi and the boys joined in on the conversation.

「And strong, too. Rather, he changed too much.」

「Right. His hair color, his atmosphere… that gun… that overwhelming feeling…」

「That's not all… he doesn't have much interest in us, either… Not good, do you think he hates us?」

They were honestly happy that the classmate they thought died was alive. It was exactly as Yuuka said, though; Nana, Taeko, Atsushi, the boys, they all felt the same terror. In the depths of their mind, for a long time, they held a weight, and it seemed to have disappeared. Even if it was hard to express, in the most simple sense, they were "relieved."

But the person in question did not even look at them. Furthermore, his atmosphere was extremely sharp, completely overwhelming them.

He had once been called "Incapable" in contempt, and every one of them pretended not to see Hiyama bullying him; with the "friendly fire" event, they could not figure out what attitude to take with Hajime.

As a result, no one actively approached him.

While everyone was feeling various emotions from Hajime's transformation such as fear, Yuuka went back into a daze.

「I couldn't thank him.」

Everyone looked at each other, startled. Before they thought about how indifferent Hajime was acting toward them, it was something they should have said first… though they were not saved directly like Yuuka, it was a fact that he risked his body and life for his classmates at that time.

Yuuka's complex expression was now clear to everyone. It was necessary to properly thank him for what he did that day, but there was no room to say so; rather, it was hardly significant at this point.

「Sonobe-san…」

Aiko also did not know what to say seeing Yuuka like this. Aiko was upset at herself inwardly for being so shocked by her

student's intense change to the point where she could not even hold him back. Her words, would they reach Hajime…

Aiko had no answer.

Their meal had cooled, their appetite had disappeared. No one w anted to even look at their food. Seeing a "living Hajime," everyone was deep in thought.

It was the middle of the night.

The town was asleep as everyone was mentally and physically tired. Aiko was unable to go to sleep.

Her room was not so large. It had a wood frame bed, a table, and a small fireplace with a leather sofa in front of it. The flame which flickered through the winter night gave off a warm atmosphere.

Aiko thought through today's events as she gazed in the empty fireplace, her body sinking deep into the sofa. Inside Aiko's head, all the information was arranged like a bookshelf without its books aligned.

She needed to think, it was a necessity, but her head did not make any way forward. Though she relaxed when she thought about a precious student being alive, he was unfriendly and indifferent.

Based on how he reacted to David's words and behavior, he obtained a strength which even changed his very appearance, a strength he required to survive; she sighed knowing she could do nothing to support him. However, she relaxed after thinking about the two girls, important companions he had faith in.

There, a voice called out across the room.

「What's with that look, Sensei?」

「!?」

Gyo, Aiko let out that sound as she turned around and saw Hajime standing at the entrance with arms crossed. Aiko managed to speak through her confusion.

「N, Nagumo-kun? Wh, why are you here, how…」「How, well, I

just went through the door.」

「Eh, but the lock…」

「I'm a Transmuter, right? I can easily make a key for something of that level.」

Hajime buoyantly responded while Aiko stared in blank surprise. Once her heart settled down, she frowned.

「At a time like this, and without knocking on the door, do you think I can admire that? You opened it on purpose with a key…

Really, why did you do that?」

The words "night visit" entered Aiko's mind for a moment. Considering he was a student, she shook her head. Hajime parried her words by giving her his reason for the thoughtless visit.

「Well, that's my bad. I didn't want others to see me. I thought I'd tell you what you wanted to know, but I couldn't because of those people from the Kingdom and the Church. I'm sure it would get them into a rage.」

「Talk? Nagumo-kun, you have something to ask that you can't tell the others…」

Aiko's eyes brightened in expectation. If this was a student consultation, it was within her realm of responsibility.

However, Hajime denied that expectation immediately.

「No, I'll be leaving afterward, okay? Please stop looking at me like that… I'm telling you because I think you can decide calmly. After you hear it, you can judge for yourself as to what to do.」

While prefacing this, he began speaking of the "Liberators" and the gods who went mad that he heard from Oscar.

Of course, there was a reason Hajime told Aiko.

According to this, even if the Hero danced on the board, the gods had no intent on returning them to their home. Even if they saved the Humans, even if they won the war, it would simply be because the pantheon was pulling their strings from above. They had no reason to part with the Heroes who were such an interesting piece. It would be more appropriate to think of this as a game with the Heroes as pieces.

However, Hajime did not tell her for simple reasons. He was not interested in the future of his classmates and simply thought it troublesome. Even if the information reached Kouki's ears, that man was like a lump of justice who would simply ignore Hajime's words.

Only one person, furthermore, in his transfigured state, would believe him and be able to get further help. He would not so easily be blamed for scoffing at "Eht-sama" who the people worshiped. He had no intention of telling Kouki and the others in the least.

However, by a series of coincidences, he met Aiko.

Hajime knew. Her principles made Aiko focus on the students first. In short, no matter the circumstances, even in this new world, she would make calm decisions for the students. With everyone yearning to return home, and from the attitude of his fellow classmates, if Aiko spoke, her words could influence Kouki.

As a result, he would influence them without their realizing it. However, if Kouki moved different from the gods' wishes, the

gods would certainly be more alert.

Hajime's existence as he conquered the Great Labyrinths would surely stand out at some point. He would receive interference. By passing on this information to Kouki indirectly, this would be further delayed.

He intended to find a means of returning home without relying on God. If he continued to act as the "Liberators" wanted, it would place a wedge of distrust between Humans and the gods, making it difficult to manipulate the students.

These were the thoughts he formed upon meeting with Aiko and the others.

Hajime had neither grudge nor hatred for his classmates; rather, he was indifferent to them. If he could use them, he would. If they were not useful, he would ignore them. This time, he disclosed the information because he could use them by chance.

Aiko stared in blank surprise as she listened to Hajime. She could not digest the information and it would take time before she could think properly.

「Well, that's how it is. That's what I learned in the Abyss. As for what you do, I leave it to you. You can think of it as the truth or you can think of it as a joke and ignore it all. Either way, please keep me in your favor.」

「N, Nagumo-kun, for the "Liberators," is that why you're traveling…?」

「Ha, no way. From the very depths of my heart, I don't care what happens to this world. I'm just looking for a way to return home. The only reason I told you this is because it's convenient for me.」

He snorted at Aiko's question. Though she was relieved he was not poking his head into such an irrational thing, she could not help but frown as a teacher toward his remarks which cast others aside without hesitation. Still, she was giving priority to her students over the situation of the world, so she could not say much.

「Anything else?」

「Not really. The Great Labyrinths are the key. You just need to continue searching. If you pass the 100th floor, then rejoice, you've made it to the true Great Labyrinth. Just be prepared to put your life on the line, though I'm sure you can imagine that from looking at my appearance. You won't be able to last if you can't handle my "Overpower."」

Aiko recalled the pressure Hajime released during his dinner. She could only let out a complicated noise filled with both sympathy and praise after getting a grasp of the harsh conditions Hajime lived through.

For a while, the silence continued. Hajime realized he had finished his business and placed his hand on the door. Aiko then remembered the words of a certain student in Orcus Great Labyrinth.

「Shirasaki-san hasn't given up yet.」「…」

Hajime stopped moving from Aiko's unexpected words. Aiko quietly stared at Hajime's back.

「Even when everyone thought you died, she did not give up. Until she confirms it with her own eyes, she will believe you are alive. She is fighting in 【Orcus Great Labyrinth】now. Though the others are entering as combat exercise, for her, she intends to find you.」

「… Is Shirasaki well?」

After a long silence, Hajime asked Aiko. For the first time, he showed signs of worrying about others. Aiko thought the Hajime from before was gone, so she was happy to hear this.

「Y, yes. Though 【Orcus Great Labyrinth】is a dangerous place, they have developed well and are advancing. That was what was in a letter I received before. Are you anxious? Nagumo-kun, you always did get along well with Shirasaki-san.」

Aiko spoke radiantly. Hajime neither confirmed nor denied it. He simply looked over his shoulder expressionlessly.

「That's not what I meant… Well, it's fine if you say this in your next letter. In the Labyrinth, what you need to watch out for aren't the demons. It's your companions.」

「Eh? What do you…」

「Sensei, you can guess from today's circumstances and everyone's attitudes. Do you really think my fall into hell during that fight with the behemoth was an accident?」

「Th, that's… yes, someone miss-controlled their magic and hit you… Nagumo-kun, so you still have a grudge toward everyone…」

「That doesn't matter. But that's the important thing. Friendly fire? No. Someone was clearly intent on aiming for me.」

「Eh? Intent? Aiming?」

Aiko did not understand. Hajime's next words mercilessly pushed her further into a corner.

「One of my classmates tried to kill me.」

「!?」

Aiko went pale, 「The only thing I can think of is that someone was

jealous of me for getting along well with Shirasaki. It's good that she's still safe, but advise her not to allow any attacks come from behind.」With that, Hajime left.

A cold wind blew through the room, and Aiko held her body tightly. This meant someone aimed for Hajime while he was on the verge of death. Furthermore, it was one of Aiko's precious students. She could not accept it so easily, but she would be groundlessly denying Hajime's words. She struggled, wanting to support her students.

Aiko was even more troubled and spent the night without sleep.

Chapter 2

The moon's bright face faded as the light from the eastern sky lit upon Hajime, Yue, and Shea. They had finished preparing and stood outside "Water Fairy Hotel."

They had bagged rice in hand and planned on eating on the move. Though it was extremely early, Voss prepared breakfast without showing any signs of displeasure on his face. It truly was a high-class hotel. Hajime, without reservation, received it and thanked the man while feeling admiration at his management.

While the early morning mist remained, Hajime and the girls headed to the north gate. A highway leading to the mountains went from there. Because it would take a full day on horseback, he expected the three of them to reach their destination in 4 hours on Stiefe.

It had been 5 days since Will Kudeta's group left for an investigation of 【The Northern Mountain Range】and went missing. It was essentially hopeless for him to survive. It may have been called an emergency, but Hajime also considered the possibility that Will and the others being alive as a low one. However, since his image would improve in Iruwa's eyes if the man was alive, he decided to search as quickly as possible. Fortunately, the weather was good. It was a fine day for his job.

While the sound of people beginning to work sounded from the surrounding buildings, he began heading north. Hajime felt the presence of many people on the other side of the gate and narrowed his eyes. They were just standing around, since they did not seem to be moving.

The figures which appeared through the morning haze… were Aiko and the six students.

「… I can imagine the reasons, but please tell me… What are you doing?」

Hajime looked at Aiko with his eyes half open.

Though the presence he exerted made Aiko quiver, she took a firm attitude and stood in front of Hajime. Talking idly behind her were the students, Sonobe Yuuka, Sugawara Taeko, Miyazaki Nana, Tamai Atsushi, Aikawa Noboru, and Kawahara Akira, who walked up with her.

「We will also go. We are searching for a missing person. It's best with many people.」

「I decline. You can go on your own, but even then, I refuse.」
「Wh, why?」

「Our speed is just too different. You won't be able to keep up.」
He could see horses prepared behind them. Though Hajime

wondered if they could actually ride horses, he set that thought aside. Even if they could, the speed was far different from his magically driven vehicle.

Yuuka looked at the surroundings in confusion and tilted her head. In all respects, she did not see any means of

Horse

transportation that Hajime had prepared.

「A difference in speed… is it, Nagumo? Don't tell me you can move faster than a horse? You don't want to have anything to do with us, so this is the way you're refusing? But considering how we felt yesterday… I don't think it would be hard to stop us with your ability.」

Yuuka objected somewhat impolitely on reflex. However, it was a fact that there were means of travel faster than horses, since living creatures were limited by their stamina. In truth, Yuuka had tempered herself in order to talk to Hajime, but she responded on instinct; even so, she had largely arrived at the correct answer seeing Hajime's ability the day before.

Hajime glanced over at Yuuka. 「Mu,」 she muttered in caution, or perhaps it was an odd sense of rivalry; either way, he could not tell very well from Yuuka's expression. Hajime sighed. Figuring it would be troublesome to explain, he silently pulled Stiefe out of "Treasure Warehouse."

Suddenly seeing a large bike appear from space stunned everyone.

「You're misunderstanding something, aren't you? There's no reason to get so angry. I simply meant our moving speed is different.」

Aiko and the others did not know how to respond to seeing the Stiefe, a relic of the old world.

Aikawa, a motorcycle lover, began speaking to Hajime in excitement.

「Th, this, did you make it like the gun yesterday, Nagumo?」
「Pretty much. Now, please stand back.」

Hajime spoke bluntly and began to leave.

Apparently, Aiko and his classmates wanted to follow him. There were two reasons.

One was was to verify the truth of what Hajime said last night. Aiko could not overlook his words of “a classmate tried to kill me,” and she wanted to hear more details from Hajime. After their search was complete, she did not know how long until she would meet with Hajime again.

The other was to find Yukitoshi Shimizu who had gone missing. They had searched every area and sifted through all information they could, but they found no sign of him in town or in the vicinity.

However, no one lived on 【The Northern Mountain Range,】and the information gathered there was not satisfactory. Naturally, if he disappeared on his own, it would be to the north. She wanted to take advantage of this situation.

As an aside, it was partly a coincidence that Yuuka and the others were there.

Aiko had made preparations to head to the gate before dawn and waited for Hajime outside the hotel. On her way out, she met Sonobe Yuuka who was using the toilet.

Seeing Aiko prepared and ready to go out at such an early time, as part of Ai-chan's guard, Sonobe allowed no deceit.

And since Aiko had consented to her going, she roused the other members of the Ai-chan Escort to join the search party.

Since she knew Hajime and the knights would simply quarrel, she left a message, though there was no telling if anyone would read it…

Aiko quietly told Hajime she would go after him.

Given the dark circles under her eyes, she hardly slept at all after hearing Hajime's story.

「Nagumo-kun, I am your teacher, I need to hear more from you. I won't part until you tell me everything. Isn't it troublesome to keep running away? We have time on the journey, right?

Though, as you said, you can get away from us…」

Hajime regretted talking to Aiko seeing the determination in her eyes. He understood Aiko's drive (though there were a number of pitfalls in her planning.) No matter how he deceived her or ran away, she would just use the knights to perform a large search.

He looked to the sky, it was getting bright. Taking time to argue when Will's life potentially hung in the balance would be a problem. Hajime let out a deep sigh and accepted this as a consequence of his deeds before looking at Aiko again.

「Fine. I'll allow you to come along, but there's not much more to talk about.」

「I don't care. I just want to properly hear things from your mouth.」

「Haa, you're a teacher no matter where you go.」「Naturally!」

Aiko looked relieve and placed her hand on her chest in relief. The students also seemed to relax with the negotiations going well.

「…Hajime, you'll take them?」

「Yeah, this person, no matter what, is a "teacher." She makes no compromises with the students. If I leave them back here, it will be troublesome later.」

「Hoee～ She's a good teacher then～」

Yue and Shea were surprised that Hajime broke. Hajime smiled with a mixture of bitterness and admiration.

Hajime did not think it a bad thing that Aiko was a "teacher" to the very end. She was one of the few precious adults he payed respect

to despite no longer caring about the category of students and classmates.

「But we can't fit more than three people on this bike, right? What will we do?」

Yuuka pointed out something reasonable. Since it was impossible to take Aiko and the others along if he sat on the bike with Yue and Shea unless he stayed back with the horses, he put Stiefe into the "Treasure Warehouse" and instead pulled out Brise.

A brutal vehicle similar to military Hummer, weaponry which were clearly deadly on a single glance. Black in color, a massive object with weapons on front and rear. From a distance, anyone would think this was a demon on the rampage.

Aiko and the students could only guess that he used an artifact in their surprise as Hajime pulled out and put away large objects from thin air.

For the Hajime today, they could not connect him to the "Incapable"person from before and could only think about who he could possibly be. Hajime told Sonobe and the others 「Those who can't fit in here, please stay in the carriage.」 Sonobe looked at him with a complicated expression as he quickly got in the driver's seat.

A large Hummer drove down the road to the north — Brise. Because there was suspension, most bumps were diminished.

Naturally, those sitting in the carriage behind did not feel any discomfort.

By the way, he purposefully installed a carriage in “Treasure Warehouse” so he could set up the gatling gun to use on the move. It was a small addition made at Hajime’s preference.

In the car, on the bench seat, Hajime naturally sat on the driver’s seat. Aiko sat next to him, and Yue next to her. The reason was so she could hear Hajime’s story. Aiko did not seem to want the other students to hear everything, so she wanted to sit beside him.

Normally, Yue sat beside Hajime, but she knew Aiko wanted to hear information. Reluctantly, she allowed Aiko to sit by his side. Still, since they were both small, there was room to spare.

On the contrary, Shea, who sat in back, felt a little constricted. Needless to say, Yuuka and Taeko were quite voluptuous themselves, so they took up space. The slender Nana, being squeezed in amongst Shea and Yuuka’s larger assets, pouted as their chests touched her. She could only respond with her own sad touch.

Shea was the most uncomfortable of all, though.

For some time now, Nana had been staring at Shea’s breasts while Taeko looked at her with stars in her eyes, trying to dig up the relationship between her and Hajime. As a high school girl in the bud of her youth, she was incredibly interested in a love between different species from a different world. She repeated her questions in fascination, and Shea was flustered trying to answer her

questions. Yuuka sat by the window, her arm on window frame. Though she did not look interested, her ear was clearly open. Because her gaze swept over Hajime and Shea from the start, she was likely interested.

On the other hand, the conversation between Hajime and Aiko was reaching the interesting part.

Despite hearing the possibility was high that one of his classmates shot Hajime intentionally, Aiko had trouble believing it. Hajime simply sneered at the thought of it being an accident.

Tentatively, Hajime thought it was Hiyama who was at fault, but it was only a possibility when he spoke to Aiko.

Aiko also could not make a decision, and even if he pinpointed a culprit, what could be done in return, how would he be compensated, she could think of nothing more no matter how she racked her brains.

She moaned in worry as the soft shaking of the vehicle brought her to the land of dreams. She fell over, her head landing on Hajime's knee.

Normally, Hajime may have acted violently, but after some hesitation, he decided to leave her as is.

He was the cause of her inability to sleep, after all, and he gave her information at his own convenience. Even then, he was quite generous.

「… Hajime, you're kind to Aiko.」

「… Well, I'm indebted to her in a number of ways.」

「… Hmm～」「Yue?」「…」

「Yue-san, don't ignore me～」

「Next time, let me rest my head on your lap.」「… Okay.」

While Aiko was resting her head on his lap, Hajime and Yue entered their own world. Kyaa, kyaa, the girls in the back watched the two, while the rabbit-eared girl was sulky.

It was impossible to think they would soon enter a danger zone where a mysterious incident had occurred.

【Northern Mountain Range】

The mountains ranged from an altitude of 1000 meters to 8000 meters in height with trees and plants springing up in a scattered manner. Some areas were reminiscent of a mountain in autumn while other areas were full if vivid green foliage one might see in midsummer. There were also places with dead trees.

Furthermore, by passing over the mountain, more could be found even further to the north.

As for where this led, a certain adventurer aimed for beyond the fifth mountain range, but because of the distinct nature and strength of the demons there, he had not succeeded.

Incidentally, the mountain with the highest peak would be 【Kamiyama.】

Hajime was heading about 1600 kilometers east of 【Kamiyama.】 The trees were vivid red and yellow, and it was filled with spices and mountain herbs. For a town like 【Ul,】 this enriched area was truly fruitful.

「Haa,」 some of the girls sighed as they continued on foot from the base of the mountains. Aiko, who had embarrassingly slept on her student's lap, was bright red while apologizing. That vivid scene of Hajime she imagined before replayed in her mind.

Hajime suppressed his appreciation for the scenery as he returned Brise to "Treasure Warehouse" and pulled out a certain object.

It was a ring with small stones set in it which controlled bird-like objects via a crystal embedded in their gray heads.

Hajime placed the ring on his finger and took out four identical models, They began floating in air. The statues, imitating birds, fell to the earth and floated. The students let out a sound of surprise.

The four birds circled the area a few times before flying in each direction of the mountain.

「Um, that's…」

Aiko, representing the group, asked while watching the birds fly away soundlessly.

「Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes,」Hajime answered.

— Gravity Controlled Unmanned Reconnaissance Planes, “Ornis”
The birds which Hajime called “Unmanned Reconnaissance

Planes” were operated remotely like the golem knights from 【Raisen Great Labyrinth】using materials he procured there.

He utilized Creation Magic since he had no aptitude for Gravity Magic and created minerals which “neutralized gravity and floated.” This was essentially the “Induction Stone” which were integrated into the golems’ head to allow easy manipulation.

He had also utilized “Far Sight Stone” which had been used in the golem knights’ eyes, allowing the scenery reflected in the mineral to be remotely viewed. This was how Mildy was able to grasp their position during their time in her Labyrinth.

In short, he used the “Far Sight Stone” to allow him to view the scene from the “unmanned reconnaissance planes” with hisi Evil Eye.

Because there was a limit in the processing power of a human brain, four was the most he could operate at once. It was completely mysterious how Mildy was able to operate more than fifty golems.

Tentatively, his processing ability increased when he used “Light Speed.” While using “Light Speed,” he could enact fine control on seven planes at once for a set time limit.

This time, since the search field was wide, he took the Ornis out to search by the sky.

Seeing Ornis fly far away, his classmates made an oath to themselves to not be surprised anymore.

The group advanced on a mountain path the adventurers would likely have passed along.

Since Will and the adventurers were sent to investigate the various demon sightings, Hajime walked down the path while using the unmanned planes to search the surroundings, allowing them to move at a high pace.

In just over an hour, Hajime reached the sixth reported sighting before stopping. The reason was so he could slowly examine the surroundings.

「Haa, haa, C, can we rest… Kehoo, Haa, haa.」「Zee, Zee, You okay… Ai-chan Sensei… Zee, Zee.」

「Uu, Pu, Can I rest? Haa, haa, it’s fine, right? We can rest?」「… Hyuu, Hyuu.」

「Geho, Geho, Nagumo, are all of you demons or something…」
Aiko and the students were more lacking in physical strength than

he anticipated, forcing them to rest.

Aiko was desperately trying to regain her breath while on all fours. Noboru and Akira were breathing heavily, as if they were about to die, while barely keeping from falling. Nana had a face that a girl really must not show.

On the contrary, Yuuka and Taeko did not fall over. They were leaning against nearby trees, and though clearly fatigued, there were no signs that they were on the verge of collapse. Perhaps it was related to their occupation.

Yuuka was a “Thrower” and Taeko was a “Whip User.” The former focused on throwing abilities, utilizing knives and darts and other projectile weapons, while the latter focused on whips and rope.

Appearance wise, seeing Yuuka throw knives and juggle them and seeing Taeko skillfully brandish a whip… amongst the students, half were of the opinion that it was a surreal sight while the other half thought it well suited the two.

Atsushi and Noboru were tentatively a part of the vanguard like the two girls… but it was not good to point out the fact that they were defeated in physical strength as it would be a mental blow.

Hajime glanced at the group and decided to take a rest at a nearby river while he searched the surroundings. He knew the position based on information he received from Ornis. After telling Aiko and the students the position of the river, he headed there first. The possibility that Will rested there was also high.

Yue and Shea went with him down a side path and progressed up the mountain. They walked beneath the trees, enjoying the sounds of the leaves crushing beneath their feet and the small stream flowing down the mountain. Piko Piko, Shea's ears happily bounced.

Hajime and the others finally reached the river. It was a little larger than a brook. Shea, whose ability to search the surroundings was the highest, did not see any sign of demons. Hajime also searched the surroundings with the reconnaissance planes. Hajime sat on a rock by the riverbank to relax and began talking about their future search policy.

Yue said 「Just for a bit」 and took off her shoes to walk in the river, selfishly enjoying herself while they waited. As always, he was sweet on her. Shia, incidentally, took advantage of this time as well.

Considering the possibility of Will having moved upstream, Hajime searched with the planes while watching Yue play in the river barefooted. Though Shea was also barefoot, she was only standing. It seemed the flow of the river tickled her feet.

Aiko and the others, who caught their breath, finally arrived. They stared at the scenery greeting them.

The three boys, seeing Yue and Shea play barefooted shouted 「This is Heaven」 while the girls looked coldly at them. Yue felt both the gaze of the boys as well as one from upriver.

The students sat down and hydrated themselves. Since the boys started trembling from the gaze upriver, Aiko looked warmly at Hajime. Sonobe, too, who spoke to Shea during the trip, also had a suitable expression.

「Fu fu, Nagumo-kun, you really do treasure Yue-san and Shea-san.」

Aiko spoke happily.

Hajime shrugged indifferently. Instead, Yue showed it by her actions. As if it were natural, she abruptly sat on Hajime's knees.

「… Mm.」

Finding a satisfying position, she entrusted all her weight to Hajime. It was proof of her trust. Seeing this, Shea felt lonely and clung to Hajime's back.

Aiko suddenly blushed as the three formed a pink space. Yuuka and the schoolgirls were going Kyaa, Kyaa, while Tamai and the other boys were gritting their teeth.

Hajime was the same as always and did not bother shaking them

away; rather, he simply looked to the distance. He was feeling shy. However, his expression became stern in an instant.

「… This is….」

「Mm… Did you see something?」

Noticing that Hajime had seen something in the distance, Yue confirmed with him. Aiko and the others blinked in confusion.

「Upstream… A shield? There's a bag, too… It looks fresh. Bingo. Yue, Shea, let's go.」

「Mm…」 「Yes!」

Hajime and the girls began to move.

Aiko and the students wanted to rest more, but noticing his true intent, they refrained and followed after him. Still, since they were tired, they could not follow them at a reasonable speed. Hajime's group quickly moved up the river, while they followed as quickly as they could.

Hajime confirmed what he saw through the unmanned reconnaissance planes. He found a small round shield and a bag. The shield was partially crushed, and the bag was halfway torn open.

Hajime carefully observed the surroundings. He spotted the bark of a nearby tree being torn off. It was at approximately 2 meters in height. It was not something a human could easily do.

While having Shea, the best amongst them with detection, search, Hajime fully focused his senses on the damaged trees in the surroundings.

As they advanced further, they saw signs of a fight. Trees and branches were broken, plants were stepped on. There were broken swords and scattered blood as well. Every time they found more, Aiko and the students became more tese.

This was especially true of Yuuka whose heart had once folded to the terror of death; perhaps she was recalling her time in

【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】her complexion was clearly worse at a glance. Understanding this, she held her body, desperately trying to suppress the emotion.

Ignoring them all, Shea had moved forward and soon discovered something shining.

「Hajime-san, this, is this a pendant?」

「Hm? Ah… It was left behind. Let me check.」

Shea cleaned the pendant of dirt and noticed it was a locket. When unlocking it, they found a woman's photograph. Perhaps it was someone's lover or wife. It was hardly a good clue. It was likely just one of the adventurer's belongings.

Afterward, they saw the belongings of the departed scattered about. They collected only the things that might specify a person's identity.

They searched for a long time; with nightfall fast approaching, they were about to start preparing for camp.

Excluding these signs, they had yet to see any signs of life. They did not encounter any demons Will and the adventurers were sent off to investigate.

Even going as far as the 8th and 9th sighting locations, they found nothing. Normally, there would be at least a weak demon or two; Hajime felt it eerie.

After a while, the planes found an abnormal location. It was 300 meters east and was full of signs of destruction. Hajime urged everyone to hasten their pace.

They reached a large river with a small waterfall further upstream. The volume and flow of water was intense. Though it would normally flow straight, there was a large area that seemed as if it were carved out by a laser or something similar.

The surrounding trees and ground were also scorched. Furthermore, many trees had broken, knocked aside tens of meters aside, as if they received a large impact. Large footprints, greater than 30 centimeters, were left behind.

「There was combat here… And this footprint, this is a large-scale demon… True, there are brutal demons across the mountain, but this doesn't seem normal…」

Hajime referred to orcs and ogres when he said brutal. Though they did not have great intelligence, they acted in a crowd, and, with their unique magic which was similar to a deteriorated version of his "Strength of Gold," they were powerful enemies. Usually they lived beyond the second mountain range, so they would not come near the town. Furthermore, they had no attacks which could cause this kind of destruction.

Hajime squatted down and looked at the footprint. He hesitated and looked upstream and downstream.

Though Will had escaped by running, it was hard to think he would run upstream during combat. If so, he was doing so to keep away from the town, but that was unlikely in such a tense situation.

Hajime headed downstream while driving Ornis upstream. Seeing the footsteps by the river's edge, there was a high possibility that Will ran into the river. In such a physically taxing situation, he could very well pass out.

The others agreed with Hajime's thoughts and descended.

Eventually, they reached a waterfall which was smaller than the one before.

At the base of the waterfall, a reaction was caught by Hajime's "Physical Perception."

「! This is…」「… Hajime?」

Yue called out to him. Hajime, for a while, closed his eyes and concentrated. He opened his eyes slowly and let out a voice of surprise.

「Hey, seriously? I thought I felt someone from my Physical Perception. He's… inside the waterfall.」

「Someone's alive!?」

Hajime nodded in response to Shea's surprise. Yue asked the number, and he responded with 「Just one.」

Aiko was also surprised; naturally, they expected there to be no survivors, despite there being a slim chance of some living. It had been 5 days since Will had gone missing. It would be a miracle if even one had managed to live.

「Yue, please.」「… Yeah.」

Hajime, while looking at the base of the waterfall, called to Yue. Yue, understanding Hajime's intent, triggered her magic and waved her right hand.

「— "Billowing Castle" — "Wind Wall."」

The water around the river basin and the waterfall parted like in the legend of Moses and the Red Sea while the water droplets were reflected by a wall of wind. “Billowing Castle” and “Wind Wall” were Advance Rank Water and Wind Magic which compressed each element to a high degree.

Utilizing magic of two attributes with neither aria nor formation, Aiko and the students dropped their jaws, not understanding what happened. Surely the Hebrews had a similar look.

Since magic was not infinitely flexible, Hajime urged everyone back and broke through the back of the river basin.

When he entered the cavern, he looked up and saw a small ledge with water and light pouring down. There was a space further in, since the water was not overflowing.

They found a man who had fallen sideways at the back of that space. As they approached, they saw he was in his early 20s. Though he had simple features, he was pale and had a ghastly complexion. Still, there were no large injuries. Since there was some food remaining in his bag, he was just asleep. His poor complexion was due to being forced to remain here alone.

Though Aiko wanted to quickly check his condition, Hajime used his artificial arm to flick the man in the chin, forcefully waking the man.

「Guwaa!!」

He screamed as he awoke. The young man writhed about in pain, holding his chin. Aiko also trembled at the strong flick.

Hajime approached the teary-eyed man and asked his name. 「Are you Will Kudeta? Earl Kudeta's third son?」

「N, o, why, are you here…」

Hajime brought his finger to the man's chin yet again, though the man could not quite grasp the situation.

「Answer my question. I'll raise the strength by 20% every time you don't answer my question.」

「Eh, eh!?」

「Are you Will Kudeta?」

「Um, uwah, yes! I am! I'm Will Kudeta! Yes!」

The moment the man tried to evade the question, Hajime's eyes had a dangerous light and he brought his left hand forward. The young man, in a panic, introduced himself. Apparently, he was the person in question; it was a miracle he was alive.

「I see. I'm Hajime. Nagumo Hajime. I came here upon the request of the head of the Fyuren Guild Branch, Iruwa Chang. It's good you're alive (for my convenience.)」

「Iruwa-san!? I see. That person… He helped me again… Um, thank you. For taking Iruwa-san's request.」

Will expressed his thanks with a look of respect. He did not care about being woken up in such a rough manner. Despite being an important person in the public eye, he had a large difference in character from the pig before.

Hajime pushed everyone to introduce themselves before Will told them what happened.

In short.

Will and the adventurers, 5 days ago, traveled down the same mountain path Hajime did when they suddenly encountered brutal demons.

As expected, it was difficult confronting them, so the group was preparing to withdraw toward the river.

They were surrounded by the brutal demons, and, to escape from the encirclement, two people (a Fighter and a Light Soldier) were sacrificed. After that, when they reached the large river, they found despair.

It was a jet black dragon.

As soon as Will appeared, the black dragon shot out its breath, causing Will to fall into the river. As for the others, they were surrounded by these demons from the side and attacked from the

front by the dragon.

Will fell into the basin and advanced down the cave he found by chance, hiding himself within.

Somehow, his circumstances reminded Hajime of his own.

Will began sobbing while speaking. He asked for a huge favor and went with strong, experienced adventurers who took the trouble to teach him as well.

He could not confirm their safety, yet he miserably waited and trembled in fear for help which may not have come.

He felt he was the worst for feeling relieved when he was rescued despite his companions dying.

He was filled with a variety of emotions.

「I, I'm the worsht. Uu, Everyone ij dead, but I go on, Hic, I survived… I shouln't, guu… Why…!」

Will's wails echoed through the cavern. No one could do anything, nor did they blame him. The students could only watch him in sorrow.

Aiko gently rubbed his back.

Yue stood expressionlessly as usual, while Shea looked troubled. But will found himself at a loss for words when an unexpected

person reacted. It was Hajime.

Hajime lifted Will up by his coat and raised him high with his grip. Will stiffened in pain as he heard Hajime's clear voice.

「You think it's bad you lived? You feel bad for surviving? That wish is natural, it's a matter of course. As a human, you're doing what is right.」

「B, but… I…」

「If you're anxious about the dead… then live. Live, struggle hard from now on. Some day… you'll understand the reason you survived, the day will come where your life will have meaning.」

「… I'll, live.」

Though he was in tears, Will repeated Hajime's words in blank surprise.

Hajime violently threw Will down, saying 「What's come over me.」 His words were half to himself… Seeing Will suffer even remotely similar circumstances, he felt the man was belittling his own life. Hearing him say it was a mistake for him to live, he grew angry.

Of course, it was also partly due to his own character. No matter how much he studied, no matter how mature and how much foresight he had, he was still a 17 year old boy.

Hajime loathed himself a little. Yue approached and grasped his hand.

「… It’s fine. You didn’t make a mistake, Hajime.」「… Yue.」

「… Do your best to live. Live a long time. Together lots. Right?」
「… Ha ha, of course. I’ll live no matter what… I won’t leave you alone.」「… Mm.」

Aiko and the students felt something heavy deep within their chest hearing Hajime’s words. These were the words of a person who crawled up from the Abyss, his very appearance and personality changed.

After they had met, Hajime always showed a calm attitude, yet they could feel the scorching heat in his words.

Yuuka, who was especially caught in the terrors of death, felt this heat clearly. It was as if her numbed body was being warmed from the hands and feet first.

For a while, they looked into themselves. Will, who was thrown away, was also surprised.「I’m here too!」Shea appealed with her rabbit ears seeing Hajime and Yue enter their own world again; needless to say, it was chaotic (mainly due to Hajime’s reckless actions.)

After a while, everyone recovered and decided to immediately head down the mountain. There was still an hour left of daylight. If they rushed, they could get to the bottom around dusk.

Though the existence of the black dragon was revealed, it was outside of Hajime's work. His job was to investigate and take care of those who remained.

Will also consented to their withdrawal since the people in town were also in danger. Though the students had their own sense of justice and had the vague urge to investigate further, Aiko stubbornly resisted due to the danger. In the end, they all descended the mountain.

However, things would not go so well. They were welcomed once Yue used her magic to help them leave the water basin.

「Guuruuruuru」

A low groan sounded from its body covered in jet black scales as it stared at them with golden eyes… It was exactly what one would expect from a "dragon."

The black dragon was 7 meters long. Its entire body was covered with jet black scales, and there were five sharp claws on each leg. Large wings grew from its back, and there was a slight light of magic covering them. Every time the wings beat the air, a large swirl of wind was formed.

But what was most impressive of all were the eyes, gold like the

moon floating in the darkness of the night. Despite the reptilian eyes, despite being narrowed in a dangerous manner, there was still a beauty in them.

The gold eyes glared at them. A low pitch sound leaked from the black dragon's throat. It had an overwhelming power they had not seen even from the Hyveria at the bottom of the ravine in Raisen Gorge. Though the Hyveria was a powerful demon, it was like a small bird compared to the black dragon before them.

Aiko and the students stiffened like a frog caught in the snake's gaze. Will especially was trembling, as if he would crumble at any moment. In his mind, he recalled the previous attacks.

Hajime, having seen the claw marks by the river, thought it would be a powerful demon, but feeling its magic and overbearing presence, the black dragon was three steps beyond what he imagined.

Compared to the demons in that hell, though it was not as strong as the Hydra, it was at least as strong as the demons on the 90th level.

The black dragon, after confirming Will's appearance, turned its sharp gaze to him. Its maw opened, magic focusing beneath its line of teeth.

Kyuuwaaaa!!

A mysterious sound echoed through the ravine. The various signs from upstream and the lack of signs of the adventurers passed through Hajime's mind.

「! Get away!」

Hajime warned the others and prepared himself to evade. Yue and Shea also followed suit, but there were many who could not react to his warning. Namely, everyone else.

Aiko and the students as well as Will were frozen and unable to escape. Aiko and the students could not react while Will was

bound by fear. 「Tch!」

「Hajime!」

「Hajime-san!」

Hajime used “Telepathy” to issue instructions to Yue and Shea and returned to his original position, between the students and the black dragon, in an instant using “Ground Contraction.”

Though he would normally leave them behind, he would feel bad abandoning them, and, above all, it would make his journey pointless if he abandoned Will who miraculously survived. Hajime took out a large, 2 meter long coffin- shaped shield from “Treasure Warehouse” and thrust his left arm out to connect

to it. He passed magic through it, creating a large stake at the base which he thrust into the ground.

The black dragon released its breath which was like a laser. The impact and heat groaned as the area surrounding the shield melted.

「Guu! OoooO!!」

Hajime shouted and released his spirit. The large shield turned bright crimson before he was aware of it. Despite having “Strength of Gold” in effect, the breath would soon surpass its defense and the attack would hit him directly.

The large shield endured. Though its surface gradually melted, even with Hajime’s “Strength of Gold,” so any time it started breaking, Hajime restored it with “Transmute;” he would not allow it to pass through.

The stake in the ground lost to the pressure and tore at the ground, forcing Hajime back. Hajime synthesized the spikes in his shoes and bore with the attack. He held the shield with his right arm as well.

The large shield Hajime was using was made of Stall Ore placed between two plates made of Taur Ore, coated with Azanthium Ore.

For a Transmuter like Hajime, even if the attack surpassed the durability of the Azanthium, the shield would endure for a few seconds, giving him time to restore it.

Therefore, even if the breath attack broke through the Azanthium, it would not destroy the large shield.

Even so, it was powerful and was gradually pushing Hajime back. Signs of the stake in the shield and his shoes plowing through the ground were clearly visible.

With the way things were going, with the large shield and Hajime's "Strength of Gold," he would not receive much damage; however, if Aiko lost the shield known as Hajime, she would disappear immediately.

Anxious about what might happen, Hajime felt something soft behind him.

「Nagumo!」

「Nagumo-kun!」

When he turned around, he saw Aiko and Yuuka supporting him, desperately calling his name. With Hajime having defended them from the breath attack, they had returned to a normal state of mind and acted to support Hajime who was slowly being pushed back.

Though Aiko looked desperate, it was clear Yuuka's complexion was getting worse as she noticed the crimson light emitting from his body. She was short of breath, nearly dragged back into her trauma, but she still acted, proof of her courage.

The remaining students were startled into action seeing this. They jumped toward Hajime's back while shouting. Will, too, supported Hajime in a panic.

The breath attack still continued. The water evaporated from the heat, and the stones were blown about by the pressure.

Though the attack itself felt like an eternity, he had only been holding it back for 10 seconds. While clenching his teeth, thinking such things, he heard a long-awaited voice.

「— “Heaven’s Calamity.” 」

The moment the magic was called out, a globe 4 meters in diameter whirled above the black dragon. Its deep color seemed as if it would suck in all things around it. The black dragon was then crushed into the ground.

「Guuruaaa!? 」

The black dragon crawled on the ground, its breath now interrupted; however, the orb was not enough to suppress it. It only imparted a violent pressure which thrust the black dragon into the ground.

— Gravity Magic, “Heaven’s Calamity.”

This was Yue’s Gravity Magic. It created a whirling ball of gravity, a super-gravitational field which had a strength proportional to the magic consumed. It was a convenient magic she used to alter the direction of gravity.

Gravity Magic was not very consuming when applied to oneself, but when placed in a space around others, even at the weakest output, would require a large amount of magic and a minimum of 10 seconds to form for Yue. Yue still had not mastered it, so her utilization of it was still inefficient.

Though crucified to the ground, it painfully struggled to escape the

pressure. The next moment, rabbit ears waved from the heavens as Shea fell with Drücken in hand screaming 「Stop right there~!」 Her acceleration drastically increased as she swung down toward the black dragon's head.

A terrifying explosion and shockwave.

At the moment of impact, a roaring sound could be heard as the ground burst and scattered, as if a crater was forming after a bomb was set off. Even so, it was hardly comparable to the power used on Mildy Golem in 【Raisen Great Labyrinth.】

The cause was a remodeled Drücken. Gravity Magic was used to compress the main material, Azanthium. Unlike the Gravity Stone used in Ornis which "neutralized" gravity, it did the opposite and "increased weight." The weight increased proportionally to the magic poured into it. The Drücken today was truly like what the comics would call the 「10 TOn Hammer!」

Anyone who received a direct hit would suffer a super-heavy blow. Yes, if it was received straight on…

「Guruaa!!」

With a roar, the black dragon deflected the approaching Drücken with flames and thrust its arm out at Yue. Yue evaded it, but her magic was resolved in the process.

The dust cleared up. The black dragon managed to avoid the blow with its peculiar abilities.

The black dragon, as if releasing its pent up anger from being restrained, rotated its body and thrust its tail toward Shea.

「Wa wa!?」

Shea barely managed to reduce the impact by jumping and using Drücken as a shield, but she was blown far away and disappeared in the trees.

The black dragon, with its mobility returned, looked at Hajime…

and passed by him, looking straight at Will in back. Hajime quickly returned the large shield to the “Treasure

Warehouse” and took out Donner & Schlag, firing the instant it was out.

The black dragon received a direct hit from this storm of destruction without any thought to avoid and was blown away to the other side of the river. The earth trembled and the water splashed about.

Hajime felt a bad premonition and voluntarily ran after the black dragon. With Donner in hand, he released and reloaded bullet after bullet.

However, the black dragon simply shot flame bullets at Will.

「!」

As expected, it was aiming at Will, and no matter how he attacked,

he was unable to grasp its attention. The black

dragon attacked Will while ignoring Hajime. 「Yue!」

「Mm — “Billowing Castle.”」

「Hii!」Will ducked his body and screamed weakly when a highly dense wall of water appeared. The flame bullets could not penetrate through the water and simply disappeared.

「W, we need to help!」「Y, yeah.」

Yuuka calmed down slightly and pulled out her knife artifacts desperately. It was a set of twelve pieces, and they could attract each other or be called back no matter how many times she threw them or no matter how many she had left on hand. One knife was covered in magic flames and thrown out.

At the same time, Atsushi took out a short sword artifact. His job was a “Music Swordsman,” every time he swung his sword, a sharp blade of wind whistled through the air.

But whether it be Yuuka’s burning knife or Atsushi’s wind blade, they were like a small stone being tossed at a boulder, easily repelled by its black scales.

Despite having a tragic but brave expression, Yuuka and Atsushi once again wielded th eir weapons. Seeing the two, Noboru, Akira, Nana, and Taeko took distance, firing from behind Yue’s defenses, but…

「Goaaa!!」

This time, far from reaching the black dragon's body, their attacks were blown away by the shock wave of its roar. 「Hii」Will screamed as its golden eyes stared at him. Taeko and Nana also backed away.

「Tch, Sensei! Hurry up and tell them to get back!」「Nagumo-kun… but…」

Yuuka's little bit of courage also ended as she cowered in fear; Hajime judged them all to be pointless as battle potential, so he called out for all of them to leave.

Aiko hesitated. Hajime was her student, and standing before them was a powerful demon; even before this beast, she was a teacher.

The black dragon blew the water away as it spread its wings and took to the skies. It continued discharging fire at Will.

Despite firing his rail gun numerous times, Hajime was unable to grasp its focus. The black dragon's scales were extremely hard, and even his rail gun could barely scrape away at them.

The black dragon stubbornly attacked Will. It was as if something was manipulating it. It was a machine faithfully carrying out its orders. Even the gravity field did not change its attack pattern.

Hajime, though he did not understand why it so obstinately attacked Will, decided a plan of action since it conveniently decided

its target. He gave instructions to Yue.

「Yue! Concentrate on Will's defense! I'll take care of this!」「Mm, leave it to me!」

Hearing Hajime's instructions, Yue quickly stood in front of Will and said "Get down." When she saw Aiko and the students, she could see their frustration in being unable to fight.

「… If you don't want to die, get behind me.」

Though it was trivial for the students, since Aiko was worried about Hajime, she wanted to speak out. Still, she held back.

Taeko and Nana, Noboru and Akito, they lined up behind her without particularly reacting to Yue's cold words; Yuuka, Atsushi, and Aiko, seeing they could do nothing, unable to move as they had wished, took shelter behind the wall of ice Yue constructed.

Normally, they would be able to fight more readily; however, when they met Hajime, they recalled the trauma of his "death" as he fell in the pit with the behemoth despite knowing he was alive. For such a strong trauma, they were not so easily freed.

Furthermore, even if they could make use of their full abilities, the black dragon had strength in another dimension. As such, the students could only watch the battle through the beautiful wall of transparent ice.

Hajime, believing Yue would secure Will's safety, focused on attacking.

The black dragon rose in the air and continued aiming at the wall defending Will; however, the fireballs could not surpass the wall. Realizing this, it focused magic on its mouth again.

「Ha, you've been ignoring me from the very beginning… No matter what, I'll make you regret that.」

Hajime placed Donner in his holster and pulled something from "Treasure Warehouse." He immediately activated "Lightning Clad" while pulling out a gun 3 meters long, bright crimson sparks appearing.

The black dragon, perhaps realizing the following attacks could be serious, turned to him. As expected, it could not ignore Hajime.

The moment the black dragon shot its breath which brought death, Hajime released his shot.

Both flashed. Mortal storms formed. A bright crimson aurora clashed with a black light between them. A tremendous shock wave was generated, mowing down the surrounding trees. Their power may have been even.

However, victory was clear. Though the breath attack was magnificent, it was losing to the shot which focused on a single

point. The attack eventually reached the black dragon.

The black dragon bent its head backward as it was hit. The bullet was made of Stall Ore which shattered in its mouth.

Still, it was far from a mortal wound. While it shattered some of its fangs, it did not pass through the creature's head.

「Guruaaa!!」

The black dragon writhed in pain on the ground.

In order to avoid the remnants of its breath attack, Hajime used "Air Walk" to fly through the air. On top of that, he combined "Air Walk" and "Ground Contraction" to dive at speed and attacked the black dragon's belly with "Strong Leg."

Zudon! The impact reached inside its belly as the black dragon curled upward. The ground cracked from the impact.

Despite not necessarily receiving a mortal wound, the black dragon screamed. Its armor had endured his rail gun.

However, Hajime assumed that and followed through with his artificial arm. Kiiiii! It made a machine sound as it started vibrating quickly during his fall.

「You've got a soft belly, don't you?」

Hajime had a vicious smile as he threw his destructive fish. He thrust his fist which was vibrating at high speed straight into the dragon's stomach.

Dooguuuu! Its scales began to crack. The damage was building up, and the black dragon screamed in agony.

「Guraaa!?」

The black dragon received a pain it had never felt before, screaming in agony as it vomited blood. Its golden eyes opened widely showing its confusion, perhaps feeling the danger it was in; it created a storm of magic, forcibly correcting its pose.

Hajime was forced to use "Air Walk" to escape, but not before leaving a gift.

The black dragon, the moment its gold eyes turned to Hajime, was hit by a large explosion beneath its belly. The dragon's massive figure shook.

It was a "Hand Grenade." 「Kuuwaaa!!」

It screamed having been hit in the same place again. It groaned, blood spilling out of its mouth. Even its voice seemed weak.

Recognizing Hajime as a threat, the black dragon opened its mouth and aimed at Hajime, discharging numerous flame bullets.

However, together with “Air Walk” and “Ground Contraction,” Hajime ran to the sky, leaving an afterimage.

He used Donner & Schlag to attack its nails, gums, eyes, and the base of its tail. After attacking from mid-range, he quickly approached its head from the side and attacked with “Strong Arm” strengthened by his arm’s vibrations.

「Kuru, Guwaan!」

The black dragon cried out. Cracks appeared on many of its scales, and a large amount of blood flowed from its mouth.

「Amazing…」

Tamai Atsushi muttered unconsciously as he watched Hajime fight from the safe area around Yue. Even if they could say nothing else, the other students as well as Aiko nodded silently in agreement. They could not tear their eyes away from this overwhelming combat. As for Will, his eyes sparked as if he was looking at a hero fighting the black dragon.

By the way, Shea had already returned, and though she wanted to return to battle, Yue, understanding Hajime’s intentions, stopped her. She now stood next to Yue. Since she had been blown away early on, she felt a little dispirited as evidenced by her rabbit ears.

The reason Hajime did not use Schlagen or Orcan from the start was because he wanted to show his fighting prowess to the others.

Though the black dragon was a powerful opponent, it was simple enough for him to fight it with his normal weapons if he fought

calmly since its attacks were monotonous. He was practicing the phrase “so long as it doesn’t hit me,” showing that he had room to spare.

Once he split up from the group, the Church, the Kingdom, and his classmates would eventually learn about him; that was why he decided to display his strength.

Under those circumstances, the black dragon was pitifully made an example of at Hajime’s convenience. In actuality, Hajime was secretly admiring its durability. Though there were cracks here and there, there was no scale which had been destroyed. They were extremely durable; furthermore, they were not made of any particular mineral, since there was no reaction to his “Mineral Appraisal” skill.

Thinking it enough time to show off his strength, he picked up the pace, slipped into the black dragon’s belly in an instant, and kicked it upward with “Strong Leg.” He pulled out his pile bunker from “Treasure Warehouse.”

Yuuka and the girls — rather, all the students, heard the wind screaming as an anchor was fired to fix the black dragon’s arm. Hajime then used “Lightning Clad.” He had opted to use the pile bunker because he was unable to utilize its full capabilities in 【Raisen Great Labyrinth】and wanted to test it in actual combat.

The stake with an Azanthium coating began to rotate while the pile bunker released crimson sparks. If the stake carrying up to four tons of weight in force pierced the black dragon, it would die.

However, there was a proverb about “rats in a corner,” meaning wounded creatures would fight back. The black dragon was no different.

「Guugaaaa!!」

With a roar, the black dragon created an explosion of pure magic. It immediately strengthened its body, allowing it to break free of the pile bunker affixing its arm to the ground. It shook Hajime off in an instant.

「Uoo!?」

Hajime stepped back on reflex and, before the pile bunker was launched, aimed to the sky. It accelerated into the sky and disappeared. Hajime put the pile bunker back in the “Treasure Warehouse” and confirmed the black dragon was on its last struggle.

「Tch, Shea!」「Y, yes.」

While clicking his tongue at his own mistake, Hajime called out to Shea. Shea, realizing his intent, jumped over the wall of water and ice and began to yell as she reached free fall. She fell down on the black dragon like a meteorite.

If the black dragon was fighting normally, it could avoid her attack, but it was on its last legs, so it lacked the room to.

It could not deflect Shea’s Drücken which was extremely heavy.

Furthermore, her weight increased explosively as she poured magic into it. Her target was the black dragon's head, just like before.

The black dragon's head was forced into the ground as it was flipped upside down, the lower half of its body floating for a moment. The earth shook after a moment's pause.

「Fu, this should make up for my mistake. Rather, how strong is this thing…」

Shea pulled Drücken back, surprised that she was only able to crack the scales on its head and not crush them.

That was natural, though. The scales truly were durable.

「Hmm? Really, this thing is as tenacious as the demons in the Abyss. How many mountain ranges did it cross?」

Half in amazement and half in disgust, Hajime approached from behind the black dragon. Having perceived the black dragon's presence still, he knew it was still alive.

At that time, he caught the pile bunker he shot in the sky. It had fallen with an odd timing, suddenly causing Hajime to recall the odd proverb about the Dragon Clan the merchant Moore had said before, "kicking a dragon's ass."

Hajime took the stance of "Strong Arm" with stake in hand, aiming

at the base of its tail. He looked like a javelin thrower. Naturally, the stake was the pile bunker.

Everyone present understood what Hajime was doing. Their cheeks cramped up. It was a problem piercing through the scales. Other than Yue and Shea, everyone else shivered seeing Hajime's mercilessness.

「Die, worthless dragon.」

Finally, the pile bunker was thrust deep into the black dragon's

***.

At that time,

『Ah～～～!? that hurts～～～!!!』

The black dragon opened its eyes widely and screamed. The stake had been half buried with the aid of Hajime's fist.

Hearing the black dragon cry out, he grasped his fist involuntarily.

『My butt～ My butt～』

The black dragon cried out in pain. Meanwhile, everyone else froze and said 「It can talk!?」as they stared at the black dragon.

Apparently, this would not be a simple dragon extermination. 『P, pull it out～ Pull it out of my butt～』

In this ruined battlefield, a woman's voice descended. They were not spoken words but telepathy spread out through a large area. Because she could not speak human words with a dragon's vocal chords, her words were communicated in a way other than air vibrations.

However, it was impossible for a demon to speak Human words in the first place.

Currently, there were only a few demon species which were confirmed to have an understanding of Human language.

Then again, there was a black dragon before their very eyes, which, in itself, was an oddity. It was a powerful creature who could withstand the rail gun Hajime used in the Great Labyrinths and vomit a powerful breath attack. If it was left alive, it could be a danger to everyone.

For that reason, there were two possibilities. The black dragon came from beyond the fifth mountain range which was completely unknown territory.

Or…

「You… it can't be, you're of the Dragon Clan?」

Hearing Hajime's question, the black dragon was at a loss for words. However, she sighed as if giving up immediately. Apparently she did not want it known that she was from the Dragon Clan, but the circumstantial evidence made it obvious to the person before her. Understanding she could not deceive h im unskillfully, she said 『What a blunder…』 with deep regret. Perhaps she was

manipulated, or perhaps it was because of the impact to her buttocks that she was talking a lot… or perhaps both.

『That is correct. I pride myself as a member of the Dragon Clan. Great, right? Amazing, right? So please, pull that out of my butt… My magic will end soon. If I return to my original state under these conditions… I will cry… My butt…』

The black dragon's response was in no way expected. Hajime was amazed.

In this world, how many "rare existences" would he meet? Yue was a vampire whose race supposedly fell in war 300 years ago, Shea had the unique "Premonition" magic, and now there was a black dragon who was actually of the Dragon Clan thought to be extinct more than 500 years ago.

「… Why are you here?」

While Hajime stood amazed, Yue questioned the black dragon. The Dragon Clan was a legend even for Yue. She was interested in finding a survivor of a long lost race like she was. Curiosity dwelt in her eyes.

『No, hurry up and get this out of my butt… My magic is almost…

Ah, no good! Too stimulating! Too stimulating~! 』 The black dragon yelled out her demands, ignoring Yue's

question. Hajime hit the black dragon's butt, saying 「Yue asked you a question, right?」

The impact spread throughout her body, causing the black dragon to writhe and scream. She was hardly the god of death one might meet in a fantasy.

「The Dragon Clan went extinct, so why are you here, and why did you attack the adventurers…? I'm curious, too. I'll keep punching that thing in, so hurry up and talk. Now, tell us quickly.」

Hajime, too, thought her actions were too unnatural, legendary race or not. He would not forgive her if she was an enemy regardless, but he delayed her punishment and urged her to talk. He shook the stake with one hand.

『Ah, ku, stop～ I, I will talk!』

Hajime was acting the boss and completely ignored the surroundings. Though he stopped shaking the stake, he still kept one hand on it.

The black dragon swallowed in relief and quickly began explaining her circumstances. Her voice seemed somewhat sultry.

『I was manipulated. I did not intend to attack the humans. I was ordered to find this young man and kill his companions.』

The black dragon glanced at Will who returned her gaze, though his body shook. He seemed to have settled down, seeing Hajime fight.

「What do you mean?」

『Right, I will tell you everything. I… 』 The black dragon's story took some time.

This black dragon left the Dragon Clan village for a certain purpose. It was to examine those who came from another world. Though the details will be skipped over, the Dragon Clan was a race with excellent magic perception, and they perceived the large magic discharged several months ago when the class arrived in this world.

Though the Dragon Clan had a law to not have any relations with other races, leaving this unnatural matter aside was annoying. After some discussion, they decided to investigate.

The black dragon left her village for that reason. Normally, once she crossed 【The Northern Mountain Range,】 she would turn into a human and gather information, but she got tired and rested between the first and second mountain ranges. Naturally, she entered a state unique to the Dragon Clan, using "Dragon Form" so she would be safe from the surrounding demons.

A man covered in a black robe saw the black dragon enter a deep sleep. That man used Dark Magic to gnaw away at her sleeping spirit over time. Naturally, it would be normal for her to attack him, but the Dragon Clan had a habit of entering deep sleeps.

Then again, since they had such an incredible endurance, it was not such a large issue, nor was it simple to manipulate her.

Then how did she get so perfectly controlled? That was…

『What a fearful man. He is a genius with Dark Magic. He was determined to exercise his magic for a full day. Indeed, I could not endure that much…』

She let out a mournful cry. Hajime simply stared at her coldly.

「In other words, it took him a full day, and you didn't even realize he was using magic on you?」

All eyes looked at her like she was an idiot.

She herself said 「It took an entire day…」as she grumbled, and she even retained her memories of it happening.

Afterward, the robed man had her help brainwash the demons in the second mountain range. On a certain day, the crowd of brutal demons who were moving to the first mountain range were spotted by Will and the adventurers who were investigating the area. Apparently he sent the order for the demons to get rid of the group, and, to be doubly sure, he sent the black dragon.

By the time she came back to her senses, Hajime was completely ready to fight so she began to panic. This was when she created the magic explosion.

What happened afterward was something everyone saw. Based on the strong instructions she received, she began a suicide attack, blowing Shea away; she then awoke again with an indescribable pain in her butt.

Naturally, she was slow to recover because she had been hit numerous times in the head.

「… Don't screw with me.」

Once the black dragon finished speaking, a quivering voice

desperately called out. Everyone looked at Will who had eyes full of anger.

「… Because you were manipulated… Gale-san, Navarre-san, Lester-san, Wesly-san, Kurt-san! They all died!」

He screamed at the black dragon, venting his anger at their

deaths. 『…』

The black dragon had no response. However, she quietly watched Will.

「Even if what you say is true, they didn't want to die, and we don't even know if it was a lie or not!」

『… What I say is the truth. On the pride of my people.』 Will tried to argue once again, but Yue stopped him.

「… I am certain it is no lie.」 「! On what basis… 」

Will glanced at Yue, ready to snap. Yue gradually spoke as she looked at the black dragon.

「… The Dragon Clan is noble and honest. I am more familiar with

the legends of old than any other. She said it herself, “On the pride of my people.” That was no lie… Nor do my eyes see deceit.」

Yue’s eyes looked distant. Surely she was recalling memories from 300 years ago.

She was a princess back then, and she was surrounded in lies. Even the most familiar people were “liars.”

She looked away from that fact, and eventually she was “betrayed.” Her eyes were sensitive to “liars.” Because of this, she judged the dragon to be telling the truth.

『Hmm, to think there are people who know of the Dragon Clan this day and age… no, did you say legends of old?』

The black dragon seemed glad their ideal existence had been passed down.

「… Yes. I am the survivor of the Vampire Clan. 300 years ago, I heard many stories about the Dragon Clan; the Royal Family felt them an ideal role model.」

What was the Dragon Clan for Yue? They were a model. Her words were filled with respect. This was likely the reason she stopped Will as well.

Hearing Yue's words, the black dragon showed her astonishment.
『How could it be, a vampire… and from 300 years ago…

Certainly, I heard they had died out, and the princess? If I recall, your name was…』

Apparently, the black dragon was alive for longer than Yue. Furthermore, from how she spoke, she was not as ignorant of the world. Like this time, perhaps their way of life involved secretly investigating the world. The black dragon was surprised to learn the Blood Sucking Princess was still alive. Will and the others also looked at her in astonishment.

Yue looked straight into the black dragon's golden eyes and interrupted her words.

「Yue… That's my name. It is an important name I received from my precious person. You can call me that.」

That was all. She gestured as if embracing something precious in her arms as she blushed.

Yue's surroundings were filled with a happy aura. Having spoken of her happy love affairs, the girls had expressions as if they heard something terribly sweet while the boys began blushing as they looked at Yue. Will, too, seemed to calm down.

But he still regretted the deaths of the adventurers.

「… It doesn't change the fact that you've killed them… I know nothing will change if you die… but Gale-san! He was going to propose when this job was over… How could… 」

He could understand mentally that the black dragon may not have been lying; but he could not help but blame her. His heart would not consent.

At that moment, Hajime remembered the locket he picked up and thought, 「I set off another weird flag 」.

「Will, does this belong to that Gale guy? 」

He threw the locket at Will, Will caught it and smiled happily.
「This is my locket! I thought I lost it. Thanks for picking it up. 」
「Eh, it's yours? 」

「Yes, it's Mama's photo! 」「Ma, Mama? 」

Hajime's face cramped up.

Since the woman in the photograph was in her early 20s, he doubted his ears. After asking for more information, he was told 「It's the best picture Mama had done when she was young. 」 Everyone there quietly said 「Ah, a mama's boy… 」

By the way, Gale's partner was "manly." Gale's full name was Gale Homolika.The name matched his nature.

Will calmed down having received his mother's photograph. Even so, it did not settle his grudge. Will, calmly this time, insisted the black dragon be killed. Furthermore, he intended to treat the act of brainwashing as a lie. It was obvious he was looking for revenge.

With that said, the black dragon responded in sorrow.

『Though I was manipulated, it is true I have taken the lives of innocent people. I will receive my punishment accordingly. However, Will, will you not delay it for some time? At least until this dangerous man is stopped. He is trying to control a large army. Though the Dragon Clan by law do not interfere, this is my responsibility. I cannot leave this be… I know this is selfish of me. However, please, will you give me this chance to stop a tragedy?』

Hearing the black dragon's words, everyone was astonished. Naturally, everyone focused on Hajime. He was the leader. Rather, because he was the one who stopped the black dragon, it was natural for them to entrust the decision to him.

Hajime responded.

「No, that has no relation to me. You really were troublesome. Die as an apology.」

He held up his artificial arm.

『Wait, you should at least ask more questions given the flow of the conversation. Please! I will do whatever! It does not matter what happens later! Just hold on for a while longer!』

Hajime ignored the black dragon's words and lifted his arm. However, the moment he started focusing, Yue clung to Hajime's neck. Surprised when Yue began murmuring in his ears, Hajime instinctively caught her in his arms.

「… You'll kill her?」

「Eh? Well, since we fought…」

「… But she isn't an enemy. She never had murderous intent toward you. Her will was taken from her.」

Apparently, Yue did not want the black dragon to die, either. For Yue, the Dragon Clan was a strong ideal, something she respected. Like she said, from beginning to end, the black

dragon never intended to kill Hajime. They understood the reason why, now. Her will was taken from her. She only acted on her instructions like a machine. She originally went after Will, the only reason she fought Hajime was because he challenged her with the intent to kill.

Furthermore, he would be troubled if Will died on his account, and if one were to look for an enemy, it would not be the black dragon but the man in a black robe controlling her.

There was one more reason she stopped him.

Yue also understood Hajime's policy. The black dragon never looked at them as an "enemy." Having seen this amongst her fellow vampires, she was certain. Yue's eyes told her the black dragon was not an "enemy," and Yue did not want Hajime to kill anything but an "enemy."

「… If I compromise on the important rule I imposed on myself, I will break as a person. Killing the black dragon would contradict that rule, then?」

She was worried Hajime would “break” if he killed something that was not an “enemy.”

Hearing Yue’s words, Hajime understood what she meant in her heart. Even if she was manipulated, Hajime was not so kind as to think about such things in the middle of a life- or-death fight. He would kill her without mercy; however, once her consciousness returned, any execution would shift away from the concept of “killing the enemy.”

Yue was clinging to his neck, gazing at him within kissing distance. At that time, a voice broke the silence.

『What a nice atmosphere, sorry, but can you take this stake out of my butt? At this rate, I really will die.』

「Hm? What do you mean?」

『I am almost out of the strength to remain in my Dragon form, and I will return to my Human form. Imagine a stake this large coming out of a woman’s butt… Do you think I could possibly survive that?』

Everyone imagined precisely what she had said. The girls especially turned pale and held their own behinds.

『I can stay as a dragon with my magic, but my magic is already exhausted. I don't think I can last even a minute… Though it is not bad that a new world has been opened to me, dying like this is, still, please, I don't want to go like this.』

Her words were a bit anxious, she really did seem to be at her limit given her weak voice; Hajime had no time to think.

「… Can't be helped.」

Hajime, with Yue in his right arm, listened to his partner without thought. He was the one who understood nothing. Still, he would not be mistaken in trusting his partner.

While thinking this, Hajime carefully pulled the stake out of the black dragon's rear.

『Haan~! S, slower, please. This will take some time to get used to. Yaa, that was intense. Nn! It is coming, something is coming~』

Since it was stuck in deeply, he had to twist it a number of times. When he was pulling it out, the black dragon began to pant in a sultry voice. Ignoring that, he pulled the stake out without mercy — Zubo!

『Ahiii~~~! A, amazing… I asked you to be gentle, but you will not even let up then… This is my first time…』

The black dragon muttered words that were difficult to understand. Her body was wrapped in a cocoon made of black magic which shrunk. When it was the size of a single person, the magic disappeared.

In its place was a beautiful woman with black hair; she crumbled to the ground and supported herself with one hand while holding her rear with the other, her cheeks dyed red. Haa, haa, she was letting out deep breaths with a dazed expression.

She looked to be in her early twenties, about 170 centimeters in height. She had wonderful proportions; every time she breathed, her two large mounds which sneaked out of the disorderly clothes over her shoulders made their presence known. It was as if they would soon spill out on their own. If Shea was a melon, the black dragon was a watermelon.

「What is this… she's that vicious thing?」

「So this is fantasy～」

「Shit, wake up! My cell phone! Please!」

Seeing the black dragon's true colors of a beautiful woman, the boys, Atsushi especially, reacted strongly. These adolescents slouched forward, blurting out stupid things. If they looked straight at her, they may have been forced on all fours. The girls looked at them as if they were cockroaches.

「Haa, haa, yes, I survived… Though my butt still feels odd… my body hurts more than that… Haa, haa… This pain, such a sweet thing…」

The black dragon said dangerous words as she tried to sit up. She began to introduce herself in a dignified manner, though it was spoiled when she moaned throughout.

「I gave you trouble, really, I apologize. My name is Tio Clares, I am the last generation of the Dragon Clan's Clares Family.」

The black dragon introduced herself as Tio Clares before she talked more about the man in the black robe. He had been brainwashing demons so he could attack the towns. The numbers already surpassed three to four thousand. He was brainwashing the leaders in the second mountain range, effectively gaining many subordinates all at once.

To say someone would manipulate demons was to think of a new power which likely came along with Hajime and the others from another world. Perhaps Aiko thought the same; still, the man in a black robe was likely not a Human magician with that level of ability.

However, Tio rejected that thought. The man in a black robe was a human with black hair and eyes, and he was still a boy. Tio recalled him saying “I am better than the Hero,” as if he resented them.

A Human boy with black hair and eyes with a natural gift for Dark Magic.

A certain person came to mind. Aiko thought the same. 「It can’t be…」she had complex emotions. There were many people with black hair, but she likely thought that because she did not want to believe the alternative.

Hajime suddenly looked to the distance, 「Ohh, so this is…」he muttered. After hearing Tio’s story, he used his unmanned reconnaissance planes to look for the large group of demons and the man in a black robe. One of those planes found a large crowd of demons. The number was…

「This, this isn’t at the level of three or four thousand, is it? You’re off by a digit.」

Everyone’s eyes opened wide hearing Hajime’s words. Furthermore, the demons had begun marching already. They were heading toward Ul, and it would only take them half a day to reach the base of the mountain. They would reach the town within a day.

「We, we need to hurry and inform the town. They need to take shelter, we need to call for help from the Capital… Then, then…」

Aiko was confused by the seriousness of the situation and desperately tried to speak. Aiko and the students who, despite having cheat specs, were not mentally prepared, as well as Tio, whose magic had run out, was, let alone an opponent, not even an obstacle to tens of thousands of demons. They needed to inform the town of the emergency as quickly as possible and recommend they go to the Capital for safety.

While everybody was shaking, Will suddenly murmured.

「Um, Hajime-dono, could you do something about this…」
Everyone looked at Hajime. They were filled with expectation.

Hajime responded neglectfully, ignoring their gazes.

「Don't look at me like that. My job is to take Will to Fyuren. I need to keep you safe. We need to hurry up there and give a report, too.」

The students and Will looked angrily at Hajime's lack of motivation. Aiko spoke up then.

「Nagumo-kun, you won't look for the man in a black robe?」
「Hm? No, I checked the crowd a bit ago and didn't see him.」
Aiko looked down. She seemed to want him to stay to confirm whether or not the man in the black robe was the missing

Yukitoshi Shimizu. If a student caused this situation, she could not easily leave it be.

But Aiko would not be able to do anything against that crowd of demons. Sonobe and the other students desperately tried to convince her, but Aiko continued to hesitate. Hajime thought it would be troublesome if this continued, so he looked coldly at Aiko.

「You can stay here if you want. I'm taking Will back to town.」 As he said this, he grabbed Will's shoulder and dragged him down

the mountain. Everyone was panicking and wanting to object. They wanted to know if Hajime could confirm who the man in the black robe was and if he could possibly destroy the demons.

Hajime sighed and looked at Aiko and the others in irritation. 「I said it before, my job is to protect Will. Taking him with me

while fighting with all the obstacles in the mountains will make this fight unbearable. Let's say I fight this group and look for the man in a black robe, who will report things to the town? This is an emergency, so what if we're annihilated, they'll just get hit by a surprise attack. By the way, Brise is made so it can't be moved without me. If I'm fighting, no one will be able to get back, right?」

No one could possibly thrust their logically reckless demands on him.

「Well, it is as Mast … Kohon, he says. My magic has dried up, and even if I wanted to do anything, I cannot. Our first priority should be informing the town of this emergency. I should be able to recover some in a day, too.」

Everyone remained silent and listened to Tio back Hajime up. Though she used a strange manner to call Hajime, what she said was natural…

Aiko also thought it best and forced down her concerns about Shimizu. Her first priority was to secure the safety of the students by her side and inform the town.

Since Tio could not move due to lacking magic, he held her neck. The schoolboys argued over who would carry her, but they were dispersed by the girls. Still, Tio wanted Hajime to carry her.

But Hajime did not hold her or carry her on his back. He frowned at how troublesome it would be and began dragging Tio by her foot. Because Aiko protested, he reluctantly let go and dragged her by her neck; either way, he was still dragging her. Hajime did nothing further, no matter what anyone said; as for Tio, she had a dazed expression and seemed to enjoy being carried down the mountain like this.

A line of dark clouds grew behind them as they quickly returned to Ul.

Chapter 3

「Hii!」

A small scream sounded in a tunnel dimly lit with Green Light Stone in 【Orcus Great Labyrinth.】

「? What's wrong, Shizuku-chan?」

Yaegashi Shizuku, one of the members of the Hero Party, screamed, making her best friend, Shirasaki Kaori, who walked next to her, tilt her head.

「U, um… no, it's nothing. A drop of water fell from the ceiling and hit my neck, yeah.」

「Is that so. Fu fu.」

She looked away while giving her reason for the small scream. Kaori thought Shizuku being surprised by a drop of water and screaming was a cute sight and giggled.

In this dimly lit dungeon where it was unknown when or where a demon would attack, furthermore, on a floor no one else had set foot on, it was not strange to be surprised by something like that. Still, she was embarrassed and looked away from her best friend.

… She looked at Kaori and thought. Though watching the surroundings now, Kaori had the same atmosphere as usual.

(… Like I thought, it's my imagination? No, but it's been happening a lot frequently. I'd like to say it I'm just tired, but…O

She nodded to herself in her head.

A drop of water hitting her neck would never cause Shizuku to scream suddenly. Thinking about it calmly, she was a member of the Hero Party on this floor no one else had walked upon, it was no simple task to frighten her.

Then what was the cause…

「Hyau!」

「Shizuku-chan?」「Shizuku?」

「Shizu Shizu?」

Again, she screamed, but louder than before. It was not just Kaori but her childhood friend, the “Hero” Amanogawa Kouki, and another member of the Hero Party, the “Barrier Master” Taniguchi Suzu, who called to her. Beside Kouki was his best friend, Sakagami Ryuutarou, and Suzu’s best friend, Nakamura Eri. Nagayama Juugo, Nomura Kentarou, Tsuji Ayako, Yoshino Mao, Endou Kousuke also formed their own party, with the last party held Hiyama Daisuke, Saitou Yoshiki, Kondou Reiichi, and Nakano Shinji.

They looked at her curiously, and Shizuku shook her head in response.

「H, Hanya. Right there, a Hanya, no Hanya-san…」

Everyone seemed more suspicious hearing her say “Hanya-san” and held their artifacts, looking around cautiously.

「… Where? Where is this Hanya-like demon?」

Kouki held up the Holy Sword and covered himself in a thin, pure white light. Even if he checked the surroundings with “Physical Perception,” he did not feel any signs of approaching demons. 「Is it a demon which can surpass my perception?」 Kouki secretly thought it a strong demon, a line of sweat flowing down his brow.

However, Shizuku looked at Kaori with an odd expression, ignoring Kouki’s tension.

「… Um, I thought I saw it behind Kaori, but…」

「Eh? Me!? Where, where is it? Is something behind me!?」 Kaori shook and looked back like a puppy chasing its tail, moving

around in worry. Her vestment fluttered with her movements, seeming like a dance.

Seeing Kaori act like this, Shizuku looked apologetic and Kouki’s tension was released.

「I’m sorry. I must be seeing things.」

「Well, that kind of stuff happens. We can’t overlook anything. Meld-san said it, too.」

Kouki tapped Shizuku’s shoulder and nodded with the other members.

They had gone beyond the latter half of the 70s and were on Floor 78; Commander Meld Loggins, leader of the knights of 【Hairihi

Kingdom】was nowhere to be seen. They were standing by on Floor 70. A teleportation formation was there, acting as a shortcut leading to Floor 30. Meld took care of guarding it.

Certainly, the knights were the elite of the Kingdom, but Kouki's group had grown stronger as they traversed the Great Labyrinth. In the latter half of the 70s, it was impossible for the knights to follow, so they acted to secure a path of retreat.

They had finally parted from the protection of the knights and were now challenging the Great Labyrinth on their own.

「What are you, our mother?」they all wanted to say as Meld repeatedly warning them, but they eventually persuaded him.

「Do you have your handkerchief? Don't eat anything you pick up, okay? Make sure you let me know if something goes wrong,」 he said, things unrelated to the Great Labyrinth, before asking 「Will you be fine with that equipment? 」Needless to say, they were all wearing first rate artifacts. Needless to say, Kouki asked, 「Isn't this artifact the greatest treasure of the Kingdom!?」before leaving.

At this point, they had all settled down. 「— But to think this would happen.」

「Shizu Shizu said "san"… thank you for the treat.」「Suzu, stop with that laugh, it's disgusting…」

Though they were bickering, they began their search anew. Kouki continued at the head. Shizuku looked at Kaori to her side.

「Hey, Kaori.」

「What, Shizuku-chan?」

「Um, are you okay?」

「?」

Kaori did not understand Shizuku's question, revealing a blank expression. However, as if remembering something, she grew pale and asked a question in turn.

「Sh, Shizuku-chan. Could it be, you still see something behind me? Shizuku-chan, how long have you seen this person!? Is, I s there something bad attached to me!?」

「N, no! There's nothing there!」「R, really?」

Even so, Kaori looked behind her. When she took a shower and did other things, she felt like there was someone behind her once. That very feeling was with her now that her mind had stepped on that bath. Because Kaori was truly not good with horror, when her best friend witnessed some "Hanya-san," she could not help but tremble.

At that time, a shadow appeared in the corner of Kaori's vision.
「Noooooo, Hanya-san came!」

「Eh, wai, Hebura!!?」

She instinctively closed her eyes and screamed in the Great Labyrinth, swinging her artifact cane with all her might. Doguu, something was it. The boys shouted,「Kousuke!」

「You were there!?」

「Endo-kun was sent flying.」

「That's a nice arc there.」

Indeed, the "Hanya-san" which received Kaori's full swing was part of the Nagayama Party, Endo Kousuke, a man said to have the thinnest existence in the world. That was the case before he came to the world of Tortus.

He took pride in his thinness such that even automatic doors of convenience stores missed him.

His occupation was "Assassin."

Even when his best friend, Kentarou, was nearby, he would ask 「Where did Kousuke go?」「Is he in the restroom?」… For some time he had been there. Since coming to Tortus, his thinness which was already at the level of ESP was further polished.

For a long time, he had been walking behind Kaori, and he had seen Kaori turn around numerous times, so he thought it was impossible for her to miss him…

She had passed by him, tears in her eyes as she looked about anxiously, and she had quite the destructive power. Not good! His expression said as his heart rate went up. Before he realized it, before he could change places… the result was obvious.

Quite the destructive power.

「Eh? Endo-kun!? Wa wa, I'm sorry!」

Seeing that the true colors of "Hanya-san" was him, Kaori turned red in embarrassment. Kousuke crumbled, having been attacked so viciously by a girl. When the light of Recovery Magic covered him, his eyes looked to the distance. He truly was pitiful.

While Kaori apologized with a bow repeatedly, he simply said 「It's fine… Right, I'm used to this.」 Worried that the class's

greatest scout would retire from the unexpected damage, they silently moved ahead.

「Kaori, I'm sorry. For scaring you.」

「No. I'm the one going overboard. Don't worry about it.」

As the souce of the riot, Shizuku apologized, relieved that Kaori had forgiven her. She had been anxious witnessing this many times, and they had gone through a similar conversation time and again.

「Anyway, Kaori. Recently, you've been different. Sometimes you're, how should I say it, obsessed… it's not just a feeling, either, you keep staring into the distance… are you sure you're okay?」

「Eh? Really? I didn't notice…」 「Right…」

So it was my imagination, Shizuku thought as she tilted her head. If Kaori did not no tice it, there likely was no problem, she tried to convince herself. However, before that, Kaori tapped her hand as if remembering something.

「Ah, but sometimes I feel strange?」 「Strange?」

「Yeah, that it's hard to put into words…」

「Hmm～」Kaori tilted her head while thinking… Then her expression quickly disappeared. It was an inorganic feeling…

just like a Noh mask! And,

「I feel like there's a thieving little cat somewhere taking something away… I need to find it.」

「K, Kaori? No, Kaori-san?」

「Fu fu fu, strange, isn't it? Fu fu fu.」

「Kaori! My bad! I won't say anything strange again, so come back! Return from that terrible place!」

While saying something strange, she laughed in a creepy manner, her emotions seemingly thick like mud; however, her expression did not change. 「Not good,」 Shizuku screamed, trying to pull Kaori back to reality. Certainly, at this point in time, a certain white-haired boy with an eye patch was flirting with a certain Blood Sucking Princess; Kaori eventually returned with her best friend's actions.

「Hey, Shizuku- chan. Why are you slapping me? Stop it.」「You're finally back, Kaori. Uu, that's good.」

Kaori had returned to normal; seeing this, Shizuku let out a sigh of relief. Though she did not understand the cause, apparently something unpleasant was happening in the distance, and Kaori was

somehow able to perceive it. Having this happen repeatedly, she had set one foot on the dark side.

This was another world. There was magic, demons, and God. It would not be strange for anything other odd things being present… she forced herself to consent. Though she did not know the reasons, she had to bring Kaori back before something irreparable happened. While looking at Kaori, she determined to see this through.

And when she came to a decision, Kouki, who was at the front, stopped.

「Ah, everyone, please be careful. I can feel something with "Physical Perception" beyond here. There's only one reaction.」

「I'll move ahead and confirm it.」

「It's just one demon? Rather than having Endo check it out, why not just go ahead and beat it with a surprise attack?」

Normally, when Kouki sensed a presence, Kousuke would move forward making good use of his innate skills. Though Kousuke stepped forward, Ryuutarou hit his fist and gave his own thoughts.

Certainly, a lone demon was different from the typical situation, and they had fought without Kousuke having time to confirm the enemy numerous times. With this in mind, Kouki adopted Ryuutarou's plan and advanced with everyone.

Before long, what came into view at the end of a dim passage…

「Eh… a person?」

Everyone was stunned. Certainly, ahead of them was a person. Rather, it was the upper half of a person's body buried in the wall. The body had long hair drooping down, making it difficult to see

the expression. Given the delicate figure, it was a woman.

「Th, this is serious. We need to help!」「Wait a minute, Kouki!」

Kouki, recalling what happened in the upper floors, thinking it was an adventurer who had been caught in a trap, ran in a panic. Though he was told to stop, Kouki's high stats brought him to the person immediately.

「Are you okay!?」Kouki asked while reaching to the person. The earth below him began giving way. When he looked down in a panic, he was not standing on solid earth but on a marsh. H is feet were stuck. The moment Kouki was captured, the mud surrounding him formed into a human doll — Clay Golem. The clay golem changed its arms into scythes in an instant and brought them down on Kouki who was trying to escape from

the mud.「Ku!」

Though he groaned, Kouki's Holy Sword was bathed in light as he tried to cut the area around him. Having cut the area to his right, he shifted his left hand and moved to do the same in the opposite direction — Yaegashi School Arts, "Reflecting Moon." However, this technique of the Yaegashi School which he had practiced numerous times misfired.

「Sh, Shizuku!?」

Right, the opponent he tried to cut away had closed in with a face. To be accurate, the face of the the clay golem transformed, causing him to hesitate for an instant. Naturally, it was obviously one that did not belong there. However, the face of his important childhood

friend appeared. Instinctively, he trembled. It could not be helped.

Naturally, the compensation was dire. 「Fast!」

「— “Bright Enveloping Chains!”」

The right half of the clay golem which Kouki cut was torn away and disappeared while countless chains shining bright white sealed off its left side. The clay golem lost its form soon after, crumbling in the air as it was cut in two. The blade rotated, cutting away the entire area — Yaegashi School Arts “Reflecting Moon Ripples.” The blade had cut the creature eight-fold.

「Kouki, are you okay?」

「I’m fine. Sorry, you saved me.」

Kouki thanks Kaori who helped him with “Bright Enveloping Chains” as he got out of the mud. Already, clay golems appeared here and there; it was not just Kouki now, the Nagayama Party and Hiyama Party were also surrounded, each creature inviting them to death with scythe-like arms.

「Shit, I can’t beat them! How do we knock them out!?」 「They revive immediately, even when you do!」

Though Ryuutarou blew a clay golem away, the mud gathered immediately and revived. The same went for all other members.

Kouki ran while knocking down clay golems, trying to find a method to break through the situation.

While doing so, he noticed. In the corner of his vision, near the woman in the wall… who was not there. He felt a shiver down his back and looked about. Where is she?

「Shizuku! Look for her! The girl buried in the wall! She's here somewhere!」

「Idiot, she's right in front of you!」

「Guee,」 Kouki moaned as he leaned back as quickly as he could, an attack heading toward his neck. A wind touched his face at the same time. What he saw as he looked up were the remains, her right arm now a sword. Kouki had just barely avoided being beheaded.

「Looks like this is the boss. It's different from the others, even its body is different.」

An unemotional voice sounded behind Kouki. In front of him was the girl with her right arm changed. As was said, the woman in the wall seemed to be the boss of the clay golems.

Its left arm changed into a sword, and it began attacking fiercely.
「Like hell I'd let you try that again.」

It moved its arms, both swords, irregularly like a whip. Kouki parried them with the Holy Sword or dodged them. He tried to close the distance, but immediately before he could, a large amount of mud appeared, attacking him. Countless scythes surrounded Kouki, trying to cut him down.

Because they were made of mud, though they had a terrifying offensive ability, they had no durability. Without using much strength, he could block the attack; however, time would become an issue if this kept up too long since the surroundings were mud. Kouki, therefore, spent his time preventing the boss's attack. Everyone else were troubled by the clay golems which appeared one after another.

At that time, Kouki felt it best to use "Limit Break" to settle this fight in a single blow, but a shadow appeared behind the boss. Kouki instinctively smiled.

(Good job, Shizuku! I leave it to you!) (Got it.)

With a single glance, she cooperated with Kouki and defended him; at that time, with her prided speed, cutting down numerous clay golems with her sword, she pressed in on the boss, her trademark ponytail waving behind her.

The next moment, the boss changed to Kaori's appearance.

「!」

Shizuku inhaled deeply as she looked at the demon in front of her with wide eyes. Mentally, she understood. But she was still shaken, she was still immature. Normally, the mind would stop the body. She could not cut her best friend's face in two…

「Ahhhhhh!」

While raising a scream, she twisted her body, ignoring the hesitation in her mind. She unsheathed her sword, a high speed headwind blowing — Yaegashi School Arts, "Rising Dragon." It was originally a technique that utilized an aerial rotation with both

sword and sheathe, but it was unnecessary to go that far this time.

It was as if a dragon climbed a waterfall, splitting the current in two; the boss was cut in half beautifully, its magic core torn apart. The surrounding clay golems also lost their shape.

「You did it, Shizuku!」

Suddenly, Kouki rushed up to her. On the other hand, Shizuku also smiled, saying 「You did it」 in return. Behind Kouki, she could see Ryuutarou and the others run up to him in a similar manner. She looked at his hand. Just a little, there was mud from a clay golem there. She wiped her hand a little violently, cleaning it. But…

「Shizuku.」 「Eh?」

She looked about absent- mindedly when she heard someone cry out angrily. There was no need; her instinct told her that death was approaching. She glanced over her shoulder and saw a spider hanging from the ceiling. Its eight crimson eyes stared at her as its sharp foot which dripped a dangerous appearing fluid was posed to thrust out at her.

Ah, someone muttered. They had relaxed just a bit too much. This was the Great Labyrinth. Death was beside them at all times. At that time,

「— “Binding Light Blades!”」

With its eight claws reaching out, white crosses appeared, b l owing

the large spider away, sewing it to the wall. Because it was a binding magic without any offensive abilities, the large spider was not harmed. Still, it flinched from the impact.

Her best friend had used magic to save her. Suzu, who also tried to defend Shizuku with a barrier was surprised, 「Kaorin, you're too fast…」

「Kaori… thanks. It was close.」

Though she could finish thanking Kaori, Kaori approached, a voice in Shizuku's head saying 「I should let sleeping dogs lie～」 stopping her from saying any more. The rest felt pressure from Kaori.

Kaori moved to the wall in front of the spider which was crucified there and used "Bright Enveloping Chains," calling forth numerous chains from the ground, ceiling, and walls, surrounding the spider in a globe.

「U, um, Kaori?」

Behind Kaori who silently acted, Shizuku, who had forgotten her surprise, could not help but feel goosebumps across her body.

Kaori reacted at this time. Beki Goki, the large spider made a fresh sound as the sphere of chains shrunk little by little.

And behind her, a bright devil mask appeared.

「「「「「Hanya-san!?」」」」」

It was now proven that what Shizuku had seen was not an illusion.
「Hii,」 Kouki screamed as he retreated.

「K, Kaori? No, Kaori-san? Um, you know, right behind you —」
「Fu fu, strange, Shizuku-chan. Why are you suddenly using

honorifics? Fu fu fu. Strange. To say nothing of a thieving cat, I feel as if there's a thieving rabbit.」

Kaori was strange today… but that could not be said aloud. Because Hanya -san was floating behind her shoulder, carrying a sword pulled out from somewhere. What on earth kind of electric signals was her best friend receiving? At this time, a certain boy with white hair and eye patch was beside a fountain, receiving a passionate advance from a shameless rabbit. Seeing her best friend breaking a little, Shizuku was worried.

Kaori abruptly returned to normal as usual, and with the large spider destroyed, they advanced.

Along the way, Hanya-san occasionally appeared when Kaori began admonishing people such as when the Hero was moving recklessly, when the muscle headed charged forward without stopping, when the Barrier Master sexually harassing her, this time using an iron claw, or when the Hiyama Party grew too confident; they all hoped Hanya-san would just go back…

「I, I feel like I'll go bald… 」

【Orcus Great Labyrinth】— a place where demons ran about, a place where death was everywhere; the young fencer, despite being so young, was worried about her hair here.

Who would save her roots which were at risk from worry… that is a story for another time.

They used “Brise” and returned faster than the speed they went to the mountain. Since the suspension function was not quick enough, they could feel some of the impacts, especially Tio who was tied to the top of the carriage the boys were sitting in.

「N, Nagumo～ Can’t you do something about this～!」「I’m falling, I’m falling offff!」

「I’ll help! I’m on my abee, I bid my dongue!」

「Hauu, my wounds. Mast… gohon, more… gohon. Please let me inside～」

Atsushi stuck to the window of the carriage like a gecko, Noboru had half his body thrown out, and Akira, who was trying to help, bit his tongue from the movement; as for Tio, she was half enchanted from the pain in her wounds as she tried to get in through the window. Insisting on humane treatment… if it were Earth, he would be reported immediately, but Hajime was not caring in the least right now.

As they approached 【Ul, 】Hajime caught sight of the knights, fully armed just north of town. With “Far Sight,” Hajime could clearly see David rushing in the middle of them in frustration with Chase quickly chasing after him.

They ran for a while when they spotted a large black object. Naturally, they took their weapons out, thinking it a demon, and formed rank. The speed at which they acted was truly praiseworthy, as expected of the important escort.

Obviously, the object they were targeting was Hajime. With the boys in the carriage in back and Tio tied to the top, screaming in an erotic voice, it would be a bad thing if they were to continue and be attacked, so Aiko opened the sunroof and shook her hands desperately, calling out to David.

David continued trying to exercise his magic before squinting his eyes, trying to see the person sticking up from the black object traveling at high speeds.

Normally he would not bother, but something stopped David. To put it simply, he had a sixth sense for Aiko, a sort of Aiko radar.

He extended his hand horizontally to signal the others to stop attacking. Though his subordinates were suspicious, they heard a familiar voice from the top of the black object. David showed his disbelief and muttered, 「Aiko?」

「It can't be, Aiko's body is being eaten!?」 David went pale, but then he heard Aiko scream 「David-san, it's me! Don't attack!」 while waving her arms energetically. He realized it was not such a serious situation and grew joyful at the upcoming reunion with the person he felt so dear.

Perhaps caught up in the situation, he extended his arms, saying 「Now! Jump into my arms!」 Chase, too, had spread his arms.

The knights, their arms spread out, looked at Hajime in annoyance. Aiko naturally thought Hajime would stop to meet up with David… but Hajime, instead, poured more magic into the vehicle and accelerated.

Naturally, the knights who thought he would decelerate had to jump out of the way when he instead accelerated.

Brise bypassed David and the others without a word. 「Why～」 Aiko shouted. It took time for her words to hit David's ears due to the Doppler Effect.

He ran after Brise fiercely, raising a scream as if he had been separated from his lover.

「Nagumo-kun! Why did you do such a dangerous thing!」

Aiko angrily returned to the car and protested fiercely.

「There's no reason to slow down, Sensei. If we stop, he'll ask us to brief him on the situation. Then what? We have to explain it to the people in town, anyway, don't we?」

「Uu, c, certainly…」

Though she was not quite convinced, it was true they would waste time if they had to stop.

Aiko sat quietly. Yue sat next to Hajime and drew her face near

Hajime's ears.

「… The real reason?」

「That knight's smile is disgusting.」「… Mm, I agree.」

After this, they arrived; Yue, seeing Tio's disgraceceful behavior, whispered, 「… This is the Dragon Clan?」with a shocked expression.

Since she first saw Tio at the 【Northern Mountain Range,】she thought her a little odd, but seeing Tio "feel it" from the situation she was just in, all respect she held for the Dragon Clan shattered like a fantasy.

When they reached 【Ul,】Aiko ran to the mayor's building while Hajime and the others simply walked calmly. Hajime was going to separate from Aiko and the others here, but since Will had gone with her, he had to follow.

The town was filled with energy. There were many dishes being cooked, and it was near a large lake. It was a place people naturally gathered at. The people would not possibly think a large group of demons would be approaching within a day. Hajime, after searching the town, headed to the public office while happily eating a kabob.

When Hajime reached the public office, it was noisy. The head of the Ul Guild Branch and the town leaders, as well as the Church priests, had gathered and were in an uproar. Everyone was in disbelief and aggressively questioned Aiko and Will who brought the information.

Normally, if someone said the town would be destroyed tomorrow, they would simply take it as a madman's joke and toss him out, but it was the "Goddess of Fertility" and "God's Apostles" saying this. And recently, rumors of a human manipulating demons had been flying about, so there was no ignoring it.

By the way, Aiko and the others, during the trip back, agreed not to mention the possibility of the string-puller being Yukitoshi Shimizu. Furthermore, they did not want Tio's existence to be known. As such, Aiko had prepared what she wanted to say beforehand. She wanted to ask the person herself, so it was best she picked what she said.

Regardless, the Dragon Clan would be a heretical existence for the Saint Church, only causing more confusion. If she mentioned anything, it would only lead to a subjugation group to be formed, so she consented to keep this information secret.

Hajime grabbed Will in the middle of the commotion. He was indifferent to the surroundings.

「Hey, Will, don't run away without my permission. You need to realize I'm protecting you. Let's hurry up and get to Fyuren.」

Hearing Hajime's words, Will and the others looked at him in surprise. The leaders, too, looked at him as if he were an unpleasant bug as they turned to Hajime who interrupted their emergency discussion.

「Wh, what are you saying? Hajime -dono, this is an emergency, right? How could we desert this town…」

Hajime looked at him in disbelief and annoyance.

「Desert, is it, but they can just abandon the town and take refuge until help arrives, can't they? This is a tourist town, so its defenses are thin… If anywhere, they should go to Fyuren.」

「Th, that… that might be so… But with something this serious, I can't run away alone again. If possible, if you could help…」 "If you could help," when Will began saying these words, he froze

as Hajime interrupted him.

「… Will you not understand unless I say it clearly? Taking you back to Fyuren is my job. Isn't it good enough that you let the town know? I won't listen to your opinions. If you don't want to go… Then I'll take you, even if I have to crush your arms and legs and drag you back.」

「Wha, th, that's…」

Hajime was clearly serious. Will turned pale and backed away in disbelief.

For Will, Hajime, who defeated the black dragon who killed the veteran adventurers without difficulty, was like a hero; even if he had a terrible personality, he believed Hajime would help.

Yet Hajime's cold words betrayed his feelings.

He was at a loss for words. Will unconsciously stepped away from Hajime. In this strange atmosphere where no one could move, someone stood in front of Hajime.

It was Aiko. She looked up at Hajime with a resolute expression.
「Nagumo-kun. If it's you… Could you do something about these

demons? No… I'm sure you can, right?」

Aiko's voice held conviction, she thought Hajime could take care of them. The leaders around them became noisy all at once.

If they believed Aiko's report, then the upcoming threat was tens of thousands of demons who had gathered from two mountain ranges away.

That was common sense. The only ones who could turn that common sense on its head were those summoned from another world, the Heroes.

Even so, they could not win alone in the true sense. They would lead the humans with their companions and swallow the demons with their physical superiority. This boy was not a Hero, yet Aiko's words showed she believed he could do this very thing. Even for the "Goddess of Fertility," these words were unbelievable.

Hajime looked at Aiko and tried to deceive her.

「No, no, Sensei. They're more than forty thousand strong, right? That's way too…」

「But you said it on the mountain before, didn't you? You said to

Will-san, “Taking him with me while fighting with all the obstacles in the mountains will make this fight unbearable.” In short, if you were on a plain, you could do it, right?」

「… You remembered.」

Hajime’s careless remark remained in Aiko’s memory. There was no use regretting it, though. Aiko continued to earnestly make her request of Hajime.

「Nagumo-kun, can’t you lend us your power? At this rate, this beautiful town will disappear and many lives will be lost.」

「… How unexpected. I thought the students were your top priority. Isn’t everything you’ve done so we could get back even a little earlier? Yet, for these strangers, you send a student out to a field of death? Does your will still exist? You’re like the Church which drives people to war, aren’t you?」

「Uu～」Aiko said hearing Hajime’s ridicule. Her mind was clearly conflicted as she bit her lip and wrinkled her brow.

But her expression, full of worry just a moment ago, was a resolute one as a “teacher.” Back in Japan, whenever a student had a problem, she had this face.

The Church priests from 【Ul,】listening to their conversation, frowned upon hearing words which disparaged the Saint Church and glared at him. Aiko remained where she was and stepped forward.

「… If there is a way to return to our world, then I will take it immediately. Those feelings have not yet changed. But we haven't found anything yet … We are alive in this world, now. We meet people here, talk with them, smile with them, I don't want to desert those around me if I can avoid it. I think that's natural as a person. Of course, I am your teacher, so my priorities won't change, even in an emergency…」

Aiko spun her words, one by one.

「Nagumo-kun, you are so calm, I can't even begin to imagine what it is you've experienced. You didn't even have the room to think of others. That I could not help you in those times of need is painful… while this might be simple for you, Nagumo-kun, please, listen.」

Hajime silently looked at her, urging her to continue.

「Last night, you said you would return home. Will you live there, abandoning all but those important to you? Will you deny all who obstruct you? Can you live like that in Japan? Will you change your way of life when you return? I don't want my students to become aggressive, I'm worried about whether or not all of you can return to your old ways of life. I don't want

you to get used to this power, used to killing.」「…」

「Nagumo-kun, you have your own sense of values, and I will leave it to you to decide your own future. I will not complain; however, a future where you are only surrounded by those important to you… is lonely. When I see this, I can't possibly think you could bring happiness to them… Please don't forget your sympathy for others. It was the greatest quality you had before… Please do not throw it

away.」

Aiko spoke every word with emotion. The town leaders and the students listened to her.

The students, who were happy to use their powers, felt scolded. While they were doing that, Aiko was seriously thinking about their return as well as what would happen afterward. They were warmed by that thought.

Hajime could not help but smile bitterly. Even if he completely changed, even in a situation like this, she remained a “teacher” to the end.

He could not ridicule her, rather, he admired her. She did not know what hardships Hajime had faced. She said「I can’t even begin to imagine what it is you’ve experienced,」「This might be simple for you,」all as if it were nothing.

With his “teacher” saying that, he could not stand still.

Aiko never forced “right” on him. She simply wished for his future happiness, even if her words were contradictory.

Hajime glanced at Yue who stood by his side. Yue gazed at Aiko, as if she was watching something nostalgic; however, when she noticed Hajime’s gaze, she quietly matched his eyes. The will beneath them gave Hajime her answer.

In the Abyss, Hajime attached the last of his humanity to her before he had “fallen.” If he were to believe Aiko’s words, he would not be able to truly make Yue happy with his way of life.

He exchanged gazes with the rabbit-eared girl who looked anxiously at Hajime. In the narrow world that included Yue and himself, this girl brought life. Even if Hajime had been unkind to her numerous times, she continued to run after them desperately, curiously. Yue now saw her as a companion and loved her as a friend. Hajime accepted her, and wondered if she could bring more happiness to Yue.

For Hajime, this world was a prison. It was a cage which prevented him from returning home. In the Abyss, he had the resolution to throw aside all others to make it home; the sense of values carved into his heart would not change so easily, and he would not forgive those who got in his way.

However, even if “sympathizing with others” was difficult, he could take the appropriate actions. In the end… he would not hesitate if it would bring Yue and Shea happiness.

Hajime had not yet been convinced by Aiko’s words, but they were still an earnest “sermon” from his “teacher.”

If he were to go into a rage here, his existence would become more public, and things would quickly grow troublesome. If he worked as “Aiko-sensei’s” student, it would be much easier.

He would be marked sooner or later, so it would be best to make

preparations beforehand. It was not bad to show off every once in a while.

With this thought in mind, Hajime questioned Aiko with an apologetic tone.

「… No matter what, will you remain my teacher?」 Hajime asked if she would remain his ally.

「Of course.」

Aiko answered without hesitation.

「… No matter my decision? Even if it is something you don't hope for?」

「I said it before. A teacher's role is not to decide the future for the students. We need to help you make better decisions. If you want to talk, then I won't reject you.」

Hajime watched Aiko for a moment, confirming whether or not she was lying. Hajime asked to determine if she would be hostile. After confirming that she held no ill intent, he turned to the gate, quickly followed by Yue and Shea.

「N, Nagumo-kun?」

Aiko quickly called out to Hajime. He simply shrugged his shoulders.

「Certainly, against a crowd that large, I need to make some

preparations. You can keep talking if you want.」

「Nagumo-kun!」

Aiko's face shined. Hajime smiled bitterly.

「It's the best advice I've had from a teacher, and though I'm not sure it will give these two happiness… I'll think about it for now. Anyway, I need to get ready to kick some ass.」

He continued walking without looking back. He walked through the door with Yue and Shea trotting after him, a happy atmosphere drifting after them.

With Hajime now gone, the town leaders immediately asked Aiko for an explanation.

Aiko, while being shaken by her shoulders, looked at the door Hajime had just left. Hajime's face held no joy. The things she said, her feeling that his way of life was said, those were Aiko's true wishes

However, as a result, she had to put the life of her precious student against thousands of demons. While she said she did not want them to become used to their power, Aiko was well aware of the contradiction in making them fight.

While she wanted Hajime to change his current way of life, she wanted to save the people of Ul. Though she seemed to have accomplished both… she could not do anything more; Aiko secretly drooped her shoulders in her sense of powerlessness.

She prayed that the students could return home without losing their former selves… Already, that wish was not possible. Having heard Hajime's story last night, she felt it a fantasy, but she still did not stop wishing for it.

The leaders noisily surrounded the students who they held in high esteem and did not hear Aiko sigh.

Near the door, Yuuka and the other students watched Hajime with complex expressions as he disappeared from view.

By the way, Tio had come to the public office, saying 「I thought I saw him come here… Ignoring me… so he is doing that kind of play…」while blushing.

【The Town of Ul.】To the north lay 【The Northern Mountain Range,】to the west was 【Lake Uldeia.】Currently, it was enclosed by a "wall" which did not exist last night; the town was wrapped in a strange atmosphere.

The "wall" was something Hajime created right after he made his decision. With Stiefe, he drove along the perimeter of the town while transmuting the land into a "wall."

Since the limit to Hajime's synthesis was 4 meters, the height itself was not that grand. For large-scale demons, it would be a simple matter to climb it, but for something prepared in an emergency, it was satisfactory. In the first place, Hajime made the wall to be

something he could stand on.

The residents were told of the oncoming demons. When thinking of their travel speed, they would arrive within a day.

Naturally, they began to panic. Some blamed the town leaders while others crumbled to the ground and cried. Many stood hugging one another, and others tried to run away; there were even some who were blaming each other. By tomorrow, their town would be in ruins, and they would die if they remained.

However, there was a person who could help them regain their rationale, Aiko. The knights, the escort for the “Goddess of Fertility,” after being briefed on the situation, stood beside her and simply said they feared nothing, helping calm the people down. Hatayama Aiko, in a certain sense, was a Hero different from the others.

Those who recovered split into two. Some would not abandon their home, choosing to remain and meet their fate with the town. The other group took shelter until help would come.

Mostly the women and children took shelter, but many still remained behind to help. In short, they had faith in Aiko. Soon enough, nighttime came but the town was bright. There were many who shed tears for those who were leaving.

Those who took shelter gathered their luggage and left before dawn. Whoever remained either took a nap or prepared to fight. Though they all had faith in the “Goddess of Fertility,” they were filled with their own spirit and desire to defend their home.

Hajime sat on the wall, the vigor of the town behind him, and looked in the distance. Naturally, Yue and Shea sat beside him. They did not speak, they simply nestled up to him.

Aiko and the students, Tio, Will, and many of the knights, including David, approached. Hajime noticed them, but did not look back. David knit his eyebrows, but Aiko called out before he could say anything.

「Nagumo-kun, how are your preparations? Is there anything you need?」

「No, not a problem, Sensei.」

Hajime answered concisely without turning around. Unable to stand this attitude, David began to snap.

「Hey, you little bastard. Aiko… Is that the kind of attitude you address your teacher with? Normally we wouldn't overlook your artifacts or how you'll deal with these demons, and Aiko asked you a question, didn't she? You need to…」

「David-san. Be quiet, please.」 「Uu… Okay…」

Aiko promptly quieted him down. His shoulders were drooping downward like a faithful dog. Despite not being a Demi-human, one could see dog ears and tail on him, hanging from being scolded by his owner.

「Nagumo-kun. That man in the black robe…」 Apparently, Aiko was suffering from this topic.

「You want to find out who he is? Even if I find him, you don't want me to kill him, right?」

「… Yes. No matter what, I need to find out who he is. Um… I'm asking you to do so many unreasonable things…」

「I'll remember it for now.」

「Eh?」

「You want to find out who that black robed man is. I'll remember that.」

「Nagumo-kun… Thank you!」

Though Aiko was surprised by Hajime's cooperative attitude, since he did not turn around, she felt he must have been thinking a lot. She whole-heartedly welcomed his goodwill while secretly sighing at her powerlessness.

When Aiko stopped speaking, Tio walked forward and called out to Hajime.

「Right, good. Mas… Gohon! While you are listening to requests…

will you listen to mine?」「? ……. Tio?」

「M, my Lord, you forgot my existence… Haa, haa, so that's how you want to be… 」

Hajime looked over his shoulder involuntarily. She stood wearing clothing which resembled a kimono embroidered with gold, her smooth white shoulders exposed, leading to an enchanting valley, and her beautiful black hair flowing down over them. Her wondrous legs peeked out through the skirt which was generously rolled up to her knees. For a moment, he looked suspicious before saying 「Ah, that's right 」as if he just remembered her name.

Obviously, he had forgotten Tio's very existence; far from getting angry, her cheeks were red and her breathing rough.

「Nn, um, my Lord, when this fight is over, will you continue on your trip? 」

「That's right. 」

「Right, then I have a request… I want to go with you… 」「I refuse. 」

「… Haa, haa. A prompt answer as expected. Truly, you are my Mas… Kohon! Of course, you are my Lord, please allow me to call you "Master" from now on! Both body and soul, they are yours! Now, 」

「Leave, rather, return to the earth. 」

Tio spread her arms and proclaimed herself Hajime's slave as he

looked down on her like filth.

This only caused Tio to shake, her cheeks pink. In every way she was a pervert. The surrounding people also had blank stares, especially Yue who had a strong respect for the race.

「No… how cruel… What you did to my body… Take responsibility!」

「Eh!?」All gazes turned to Hajime. A large vein appeared on his head as he stared at Tio.

「Ahh, you're looking at me like trash again… Haa, haa… Um, I am strong, right?」

While shivering due to Hajime's gaze once again, Tio began explaining her thought process as to how she decided to declare herself Hajime's slave.

「Even in my home town, where strength is pursued, I have never lost. I have never felt a pain like this until now.」

Because the knights did not know Tio was of the Dragon Clan, she omitted many important facts.

「Then I fought with you, Master. You held me down, and I had my first taste of defeat. Your fists echoed through my body! And that

shock when you attacked that part of me, I was filled with pain! Haa, haa…」

Though Tio stood forward on her own, the knights, who did not know she was a dragon, gazed at Hajime like a criminal. Objectively speaking, it sounded like a rape, and they thought「He assaulted such a beautiful woman?」but, rather than denouncing Hajime, the victim herself seemed to revel in his presence. The knights with their strong sense of justice seemed perplexed.

「… In a word, Hajime opened a new door for you?」

「Exactly! My body is already no good with you, Master!」「… Disgusting.」

Yue, her expression distorted in disgust, spoke without any sign of respect. She instinctively revealed her true intentions.

「Also…」

Tio suddenly became shy and held her hips with both hands in shame.

「…He has already deprived me of my first time.」

With these words, everyone nearly fell over. Hajime had a cramp in his cheek and shook his head, saying「I didn't do anything.」

「I decided long ago, I would only accept a man stronger than myself. No one in my hometown could… You defeated me, held me

down… my first time … my butt, so suddenly… so intense… I can no longer be a bride… Master, I want you to take responsibility. 」

Tio continued pressing on her hips with moist eyes. The knights, upon hearing her saying 「My butt, so suddenly, 」 looked at Hajime and thought 「This man's an offender. 」

Aiko and the students, despite knowing the truth of the matter, stared at Hajime in accusation. Even Yue and Shea next to him were no different. Hajime was surrounded on all sides.

「Y, you, what are you talking about? You left your town to investigate, right! 」

Hajime responded desperately; even Yue was averting her gaze.
「Correct, I did. But I thought I would look for a husband as well…

Look, two birds with one stone, right? I could meet many people on my travels and get stronger. And I should not have too much trouble grabbing a husband, right? 」

「No matter what, you only have demerits, you damn pervert! 」
Tio continued to approach Hajime. The knights looked at him in resentment, the schoolgirls looked at him like a maggot, the

schoolboys were envious at his numerous female acquaintances from another world, and Aiko began preaching about illicit sexual relationships.

Amid all this chaos, Hajime noticed signs of a large herd approaching.

「! … They're here!」

Hajime suddenly turned his gaze to 【The Northern Mountain Range.】He narrowed his eyes and looked to the distance. Though they were not at a distance visible to the naked eye, with Hajime's "Evil Eye" and information he received from the unmanned reconnaissance planes, he could clearly see them.

The demons completely buried the earth.

There were many brutal demons along with black wolves 3 to 4 meters long. There were lizard demons with six feet and pythons which held sharp spines in their back. There were mantis demons with four sickles, large spiders with innumerable tentacles growing from their body, and even a pure white snake with two horns.

The earth trembled, rolled about like an avalanche. An old man in the crowd likened the cloud of dust to a black tsunami. A large army of monsters, marching forward with enormous strength, the dust cloud completely dyed in crimson murderous intent. The number had increased further. It was estimated the number now reached fifty or sixty thousand.

In addition, there were flying demons in the sky. They were like pteradons. Compared to wyvern demons, though smaller, they emitted a dark crimson miasma which was clearly abnormal. They appeared stronger than those creatures found in

【Raisen Gorge.】

There was a particularly large one with a small shadow on top.

Perhaps it was the man in a black robe. Though Aiko did not want to believe it, it was almost certainly Yukitoshi Shimizu.

「…Hajime.」「Hajime-san.」

Yue and Shea realized the demons were approaching due to Hajime's change in atmosphere. Hajime glanced back at them and nodded, then jumped down to Aiko and the others who had a tense gaze.

「They came. Though it's earlier than expected by about 30 minutes, they number at least fifty thousand and are a mixture of demons.」

Hearing the number of demons increase, everyone turned pale. Hajime simply smiled fearlessly over his shoulder and jumped back up.

「Don't look like that, Sensei. Nothing will change, even if they increased their numbers by ten thousand. Those who can fight, prepare for an emergency and stay on the "wall side." Well, I don't think you'll have a chance to fight.」

He was hardly eager, but still, Aiko looked at Hajime who walked away, as if he were dazzling.

「I understand… though I don't know what you're going to do…

Please be safe…」

When Aiko said this, the knights said 「Is it really okay to leave it to him?」「Maybe we really should take shelter.」They went to pass the information along to the town.

The students, too, looked at Hajime with a complex expression before following after Aiko. The only ones who remained were Will and Tio.

Noticing that Yuuka had not moved, Nana called out to her. She looked at her with a strange expression.

But Yuuka did not respond; her face looked as if she was trying to shake something off. She quickly turned around. She looked back at H ajime and the demons.

「U, um, Nagumo!」

Even at a loss for words, Yuuka called to Hajime with a full voice. Hajime, thinking the students would simply follow Aiko, turned to Yuuka with one eyebrow raised. Yue and Shea, too, turned around.

Yuuka flinched seeing Hajime's silent attitude… then she looked up and stared straight at Hajime.

「Th, thank you! For saving me that time!」

She had said it. Whether it be her expression, her tone, or her volume, though she was wavering, it was easily visible from the side, it was clear Yuuka was expressing her thanks with her entire being.

Hajime tilted his head. What on earth are you talking about, he thought. Was it for saving her from Tio's breath attack? He had done that to defend Will and Aiko, he had not really given much thought to Yuuka either; as such, he did not come to an immediate answer.

But Hajime was misunderstanding her… Guessing from his expression, Yuuka continued in a panic.

「Um, for just a while ago, but that's not all… that day, in the Labyrinth, you helped me from the Traum Soldier. And for keeping the behemoth at bay.」

「… Ahh. That time, when your head almost cracked… right, so that was you.」

「Uu, cracked… please don't use such vivid words. It's a pretty big trauma for me.」

Yuuka shook her head seriously. Hajime tilted his head, not particularly understanding Yuuka's feelings. 「So?」

「Ah, um, and… and…」

Yuuka was at a loss for words again, then she took a deep breath. 「I don't want to waste it! It might be trivial to you, Nagumo! But even so, I don't want to waste it!」

She shouted. With how things were going, her mind would break;

but she had stood up, determined to move on. Because Hajime, the one despised as being incapable, did something mad and stepped forward, they were alive. Though it may have simply been a result he no longer cared about, her desire did not change.

He had saved them. To let his classmates escape, he had risked his life.

She would not waste her life. Even if this was nothing to Hajime, even if she was weak, even if she was caught in her trauma, even if she felt weak when it came to fight, she would not stop.

Atsushi and the others heard Yuuka from a distance away and nodded deeply as they looked straight at Hajime. Their feelings were the same as Yuuka's.

To his classmates, Hajime said, 「I see.」

With those simple words, he looked away.

Did he receive her thanks? Did they not reach him? Did he come to a decision, or perhaps not? Yuuka simply stood there without turning around.

Hajime was feeling indescribably uncomfortable gazes from next to him. Yue and Shea were looking at Hajime strangely. Perhaps they were simply glad that, no matter how severe Hajime's life had been, he could still have a warm environment around him. Perhaps they were proud of him as well.

Seeing the two gaze at him, Hajime looked over his shoulder at Yuuka.

「Hey, Sonobe.」「Wh, what?」

Yuuka had not expected him to call out to her; she jumped a little in surprise. Atsushi and the other students as well were surprised.

「I thought it at the time, you've got a lot of spirit in you..」 It was true he had saved her from the Traum Soldier, she had nearly experienced death at that time, but Yuuka had

immediately run out and helped her classmates. Even when afraid of those demons, she still ran forward. As Hajime said, she was a high school girl who had spirit.

「U, um…」

Not understanding the intent behind Hajime's words, Yuuka's gaze wandered about. However, Hajime's next words caused her to catch her breath.

「You're the type to move to the front, you won't die.」「…」

Yuuka had nothing to say, she simply stared at Hajime. 「Well, probably,」 he added unfortunate words at the end to ruin the scene in various ways; he received warm gazes mixed with amazement from Shea and Yue having said those words so lightly.

But for Yuuka, it was as if the thick emotion sticking in her mind was blown away instantly, his words were a strong stimulus for her. It was not just Yuuka, for all the students, Hajime was the core at their thoughts of death. When Hajime had said 「You won't die,」 their minds all shook.

「… Thank you.」

Her words were like a whisper, carried away by the wind. Seeing Hajime smile wryly, she returned her own smile as she turned around. Though Atsushi and the other students were not sure what to say, the leader of the Ai-chan Escort energetically cried out to them, 「Let's go!」 to which Atsushi simply said,

「Yeah!」 as they ran to catch up. Their words were stronger than before.

And the ones remaining beside Hajime, Yue, and Shia were Will and Tio. Both had remained silent, reading the air.

Will was about to say something but hesitated to put it into words. He shook his head, said something to Tio, and ran after Aiko's group after bowing to Hajime.

With his head tilted seeing Will's appearance, Tio answered Hajime's doubts.

「For what I have done to Will and the adventurers with him, please… allow me to assist. Though I have not recovered enough to become a dragon again, I can at least used my magic, right?」

The Dragon Clan was an oddity to the Saint Church. Though they were classified as Demi-human, they could directly manipulate magic like demons. Though she was not as adept with all attributes like Yue, for those she had an aptitude for, she could cast without chanting.

Tio stood proudly, emphasizing her chest. Hajime threw a ring to her. Though Tio looked at it doubtfully, her eyes opened widely when she learned it was processed with the God Crystal and acted like a magic tank. Her eyes were moist and her voice quivered.

「Master… Is this a proposal before the fight… I, of course, I… 」

「Of course not. I'm lending it to you. It's a battery at most. Give it back to me later. 」

「… I see. This is indeed a dark history. 」

Yue dropped her shoulders unpleasantly seeing the pervert before her.

While Hajime was denying her after giving her the magnificent ring, the demons finally came into view. The people with bow and magic at the ready on the "wall side" could feel the ground shake and the roar of the dust storm as the demons approached. Many prayed to God, while others simply swallowed their saliva and awaited their impending doom.

Hajime stood at the front and gave a speech he improvised. He did not necessarily think it would help with their unease, but if they

panicked, friendly fire would happen everywhere.

He climbed on the wall. Everyone focused on the white-haired boy with an eye patch.

After confirming all eyes were on him, Hajime took a deep breath and cried out, as if delivering a message to the heavens.

「Hear me now! Brave people of 【Ul!】Our victory is certain!」
The people looked at each other, confused by Hajime's sudden

words.

「Because we have a goddess with us. Right, the "Goddess of Fertility," Aiko-sama!」

Hearing this, many began speaking. Aiko-sama? The Goddess of Fertility? Everything became noisy. The knights were surprised by Hajime's use of Aiko to guide the people.

「So long as Aiko-sama stands beside us, defeat is impossible. Only Aiko, an ally of the Human race, can bring us "good harvests" and "victory", she is a living god dispatched by the heavens! I am the sword and the shield who will protect her! Look! This is my strength, as one taught by Aiko!」

Hajime too Schlagen out of space and fixed it to the ground with an anchor. As he took his stance, the townspeople looked at him. Though far, he took aim at a pterodactyl through his scope.

While the residents were looking at him, he began firing Schlagen, crimson sparks spreading everywhere. The intense and shocking color spread out in an instant, showing the terrifying power in Schlagen.

And,

Schlagen showed its magnificence not just in appearance but in form.

Duooonn!

A violent explosion which beat against the townspeople's eardrums mercilessly, making them cower on reflex. The bright crimson light tore through the sky with its murderous intent. It reached the pterodactyl, piercing through it like a spear.

There was no resistance, there was no evasion. It traveled at a velocity beyond the limits of their recognition. It was able to destroy a pterodactyl from several kilometers away, the aftermath alone crushing the wings of numerous demons around it.

Hajime released lightning as he fired again, the spear of crimson light expelling demons left and right. His purpose, however, was the huge pterodactyl, the black robed man nearly falling off in a panic. Each shock wave shook the man.

And he finally brought down the huge pterodactyl, its screams reverberating through the air as it spun downward, the man in a black robe falling off at the same time.

Since he would not have much time to search for the man in the black robe for Aiko, Hajime felt it best to have him stranded now rather than let him run away later; and, while Aiko was likely to be angry with him, he intended to put some fear into the man. Still, it was possible Aiko did not even notice what he had done.

In just a few seconds, Hajime had taken care of numerous demons. He calmly turned around while shouldering Schlagen on his shoulder. The people stared at him with open mouths, some of them drooling.

To them, Hajime smiled fearlessly. 「Aiko-sama, cheers!」

Hajime raised his fist and gave words of praise for Aiko. The next

moment…

「「「「「「Aiko-sama, Cheers! Aiko-sama, Cheers! Aiko-sama, Cheers! Aiko-sama, Cheers!」」」」」」

「「「「「「Goddess, Cheers! Goddess, Cheers! Goddess, Cheers! Goddess, Cheers!」」」」」」

The people of 【Ul】were praising her with both names.

Their discomfort was blown away as everyone shouted praise for

Aiko.

In the distance, she blushed and trembled as she looked at Hajime and mouthed 「What-are-you-doing!」

Hajime faced the demons.

Hajime pushed Aiko forward here for a reason. For one, when the Church and Kingdom take action against Hajime, they would have to confront Aiko whose backing had strengthened.

It was easy to assume they would see Hajime's power as a threat and try to harm him. At that time, Aiko would surely try to stop them to prevent her students from being harmed further.

The "Goddess of Fertility" had taken root in more and more peoples' minds. There were rumors on the streets as well. Aiko clearly had a useful talent and was a living god who supported the people; the Church and Kingdom could not easily interfere with her. As such, he wanted to give her more strength to speak.

The second reason was so the people would not show fear or hostility for him despite his overwhelming strength. Even with his abilities, if he was supporting the great goddess, all feelings of ill will would turn about. Even if he was chased by the Church at this time, there would be those who supported him.

The third, simply put, was him wanting to brand Aiko as "Nagumo Hajime's teacher," a declaration of their connection so they could bear the brunt of problems together.

The most important reason was to prevent a panic in the town. Later, no matter what Aiko might say, she would come out with an advantage, and she would have to overlook it since it was a result of her own actions… In short, he was shifting many things onto Aiko.

While the townspeople were roaring out an Aiko call, Hajime looked at Aiko and smiled as he felt the gaze of the knights. He took out Metzelei from “Treasure Warehouse” and moved forward.

Yue stood to his right as always, and Shea held “Orcan” which Hajime gave her to his left. Tio stood absent-mindedly next to Shea

while gazing at the magic ring.

Looking outward, he could see the horizon buried in demons. The group of sixty thousand demons, and they had only four people at the front — it was like some kind of joke.

Hajime looked at Yue. Yue looked back at Hajime and nodded quietly.

Hajime looked at Shea next. Shea also nodded, full of energy, her rabbit ears shaking.

Next was Tio… who he ignored.

Hajime smiled as he looked at the crowd of demons. 「Alright, let's do this.」

(What is this… What the hell is this!!)

A single boy desperately contracted his body in a trench to the rear of tens of thousands of demons moving on the 【Town of Ul.】

He was at a loss for words and could not even spout out words of abuse.

He was the student that went missing — Yukitoshi Shimizu. He planned to have Aiko and the others killed as the demons

marched on 【Ul.】However, he did not expect such a violent interception.

Dorurururururururururu!!!

Dorurururururururururu!!!

The battlefield was filled with this peculiar sound as countless flashes filled with murderous intent sped along the sky. In an instant, these flashes of light reached their target, mowing down the demons as they cried out in agony. Regardless of their strength, the lights permitted no resistance. This death at a rate of twelve thousand shots per minute became a merciless “wall” to the approaching demons. Each shot pierced through their target and carried on through many more behind.

The demons crumbled in place as if disregarding the laws of inertia. Though many of them moved to the side to escape the line of death, Hajime fanned his attacks with Metzelei out.

The demons were unable to approach through the “barrage” which acted as an impregnable defense. Mountains of corpses and rivers of blood were built up in an instant.

In addition, to Hajime’s left, Shea was firing Orcan while shouting 「Fly as you like～,」 continuously pulling the trigger of the rocket launcher.

The warheads which left sparks in their wake exploded, blowing away demons 10 meters away, rending their flesh and seriously injuring those not directly caught in the blast.

Whatever remained alive was stepped on by the demons behind as they walked forward and trampled on the remaining organs.

Once Shea finished firing the rockets, she switched to firing grenades. The grenades had a delayed reaction, but when they exploded, they released a tar made from Fulham Ore which burned at 3000 Celsius.

The more the demons screamed in rage, the more of the surrounding demons got involved, spreading the flames further. In this way, the demons were turned to ash… two for one.

To Shia's left was Tio.

Tio fired a black light from her hands, apparently able to shoot her dragon breath in human form. The black flame of annihilation which pressed even Hajime's defenses eliminated many demons all at once.

Tio moved to the side, her attack killing all it touched. After her bombardment ended, only the scorched earth

remained. Tio staggered and breathed deeply; however, with a kiss on the ring on her finger, her energy returned immediately.

She drew out the magic stored in the ring Hajime gave her. Any demon in range charged at Tio as she re-energized, but she had room to spare.

「Rage oh blazing wind, Burn a torrent of flaming red — "Blazing Tempest."」

To suppress her magic consumption even a little bit, she chanted an aria. She created a vortex of fire the strength of an F4 tornado.

It whirled about, dozens of meters in diameter, drawing in the demons and burning them to sunders. They turned to ashes and scattered in the sky.

Meanwhile, to Hajime's right, Yue stood.

While Hajime was attacking, Yue stood quietly with her eyes closed. The demons, realizing the attacks were thin on her side, gathered there to escape the wake of destruction, overcrowding those who were already present there.

t that moment, when they were 500 meters away, Yue opened her eyes and raised her right hand. She quietly recited the name of her magic.

「— "Era's Destruction." 」

It was the trigger to activate magic from the Age of Gods. It was a "gravity control" magic used by Mildy Raisen, and the Blood Sucking Princess, who had a talent for this magic, kneaded it. It took her a long time to form an image for the magic; she still had difficulty utilizing it.

The moment she finished chanting, a black globe appeared above the demons.

However, it quickly changed from a globe to a thin square, 500 meters per side. This ceiling which blocked out the light of the sun descended upon them.

The next moment, it looked as if “the demons disappeared into the earth.” In fact, the people of Ul were dumbfounded to see this entire spectacle from behind the wall.

It was simple enough, though. The dark ceiling fell onto the demons, forcing them into the earth and creating a crater 10 meters in depth.

The demons were evenly crushed, the hole acting like a massive grave. Nearly two thousand demons were crushed in an instant; those near the edge had their bodies torn in half.

The demons following after fell into the hole, one after another, and those further behind, unable to stop, continued moving on. Several thousand demons fell in, and, again, Yue used Gravity Magic to create even more corpses.

The wind blew along the earth to the town, carrying with it the scent of demon blood. The people were overcome with nausea as thoughts of “overwhelming strength” and “devastation” beyond their imagination was carried out before their eyes. Shouts of joy were going up throughout the town.

The leaders and the knights, seeing Hajime’s power for the first time, stared as if they were drunk. The students, witnessing his power again, were left with the impression of their “difference” and had complicated expressions.

They were originally on the side which should have defended the townspeople from the demonic threat, but now they were being defended, furthermore, by the classmate they once looked down on as “Incapable.”

Aiko simply prayed. She prayed for Hajime’s safety and felt a fear deep within. In this ghastly battlefield, she was haunted by her naivety and contradicting ideals.

Before long, the demons had drastically reduced in number. When

the ground could be seen beyond the demon menace, Tio fell. She could no longer move, her magic completely drained.

「Muu, I am finished here… I cannot even fire a single fireball…

Sorry.」

Tio fell prone with an apologetic face. She was pale; it seemed she had truly consumed her magic until she was on the verge of death.

「… That's fine. You damn pervert, you can relax and leave it to us.」

「… Master is so kind… though I thought you would abuse me more… No, perhaps you will whip me after this… can I expect

it?」 「Die.」

Tio shook from Hajime's words. Hajime clicked his tongue as if he saw something unpleasant and returned his gaze to the demon crowd.

Already, their numbers had fallen below ten thousand; they were around eight or nine thousand in number now. With this amount of damage, it could only be called complete annihilation.

However, the demons continued to recklessly rush ahead. To be accurate, the demons giving commands were ordering the others to do so. They rushed forward in confusion, listening to the puzzling orders their leaders were giving. Hajime noticed that when their numbers had decreased.

From Tio's story, the leaders of the various tribes were brainwashed, leading their subordinates into battle. Apparently this was true given how the demons were acting. It was efficient.

Yukitoshi Shimizu, the perpetrator of this incident, had a cheat level ability. Furthermore, he was able to get strong war potential due to Tio whom he obtained by chance; still, the numbers were too much, Hajime doubted whether he could collect so many in such a short period of time…

For the time being, he saw that the leaders were moving monotonously; he knew it would be best to kill the leaders now to prevent the irresolute demons from continuing their assault. By doing so, the demons would be faithful to their instincts and run away. They would stay in the mountains to the north with Hajime's overwhelming strength etched into their bodies.

Hajime looked at his weapon of annihilation, Metzelei, as it smoked. It had hit its limit. Any further and there would be a problem with his weapon.

Of course, he could fix it, but the maintenance required to fix it would be time consuming since the work was meticulous. Since it would be troublesome, he switched his method of attack.

「Yue, how's your magic?」

「… Mm, I have enough to cast Gravity Magic twice more, it's more consuming than expected. I need more practice.」

「No, you killed more than twenty thousand alone, right? That's more than enough. Just keep me covered.」

「Yeah.」

Her words were few. They were mentally and physically in tune. Hajime began speaking to Shea, satisfied with his instructions.

「Shea, you understand the difference between the demons, right?」

「Yes. Like Tio-san, those manipulated are pretty worthless, right?」

「Worthless… yes, well, that's right. Likely the leaders were brainwashed like Tio. The others will run away after that.」

「I see. Then I just have to go to them directly!」「… Y, yeah. You've become quite aggressive…」「Of course. Because I'm beside you two.」

Hajime returned a gentle yet bitter smile to Shea who seemed energetic; however, his expression tightened, and he put Metzelei away into "Treasure Warehouse" as he pulled out Donner & Schlag. At the same time, Shea put Orcan away and grasped Drücken on her back.

There were about one hundred demons who appeared to be leaders.

Most likely, once the majority of them were killed, the rest would retreat.

With Metzelei, Orcan, and Tio's magic now gone, the demons began rushing.

Hajime and Shea rushed forward while Yue used magic.

「— "Thunder Dragon." 」

A dragon of thunder formed from dark clouds high in the heavens, releasing lightning with every roar. The golden dragon ran left and right, opening its maw. The demons seemed like they were jumping into its mouth, causing those at a distance to hesitate.

「Let's go, Shea! 」 「Aye aye sir! 」

Using this chance, Hajime and Shea met the crowd.

Hajime closed the distance with "Ground Contraction" and shot Donner & Schlag again and again. For the leaders, each shot spelled death. His attacks hit their vitals mercilessly.

The demons at the front were ignored and only the leaders were attacked in the back.

The surrounding demons wavered at this strangeness. Suddenly, a shadow appeared over their heads as a girl with rabbit ears and a massive hammer jumped down from the heavens.

That girl — Shea stomped on the demon's heads, hopping over the crowd like a rabbit, suppressing her weight when she pushed off and crushing the demons beneath her when she landed with the use of Gravity Magic.

When she was the apex of her jump, she quickly increased her weight so she could fall quickly.

Her target was one of the leader demons. The speed of her free fall compounded with her weight granted immense power to her blow, further compounded by a burst from Drücken.

Her hammer was an incarnation of destruction, and she lowered it without its power decreasing.

「Ryaaaaaa!!!」

Alongside her cute shout was an attack like a meteor. She had created a small crater, the sound spreading outward.

The brutal demon leader which received her attack directly was crushed immediately, its flesh and blood popping from the violent impact.

The flesh and blood spread about the dirt. The surrounding demons were equally visited with an earth shattering blow as each attack with Drücken scattered debris.

Shea, inside the craters she created, quickly pulled her hammer out and began her assault on another leader.

Of course, the demons were not so naive and surrounded her. They would crush her to death with numbers, surrounding her in a wall of meat.

「I'm not that easy!」

However, there was a gimmick to Drücken in the handle which allowed Shea to extend it to 1 meter in length. Using this, she spun about like a top quickly; any who approached her were blown away.

Countless brutal demons flew through the air as the delicate girl easily blew them away with massive strength.

Shea stopped spinning and took a pose to attack yet another brutal leader who was posed to run.

At that moment, her ears caught the sound of fresh forces coming in at high speed from the rear. Shea did not panic and tried to rotate as best she could.

「Guraaaaaaa!」「Mumu!?」

However, the reinforcements were wolves with four ruby eyes and black fur. They had anticipated Shea's attack stopping and moved in with the perfect timing.

If it were a normal demon, it would immediately attack her body. Shea strengthened her stance and raised her gaze.

However, the demons betrayed her expectations. 「Eh, wa wa!?」

The four-eyed wolves did not attack Shea but Drücken in her hands, using all their weight to force it on the ground.

Though Shea could easily shake them off, they managed to stop her movements for a moment.

Another four-eyed wolf opened its fang-filled mouth from behind Shea and attacked. Shea's eyes were wide open; she had focused much of her body strengthening on her feet to maintain her stance, but her body was not as well defended.

The sharp fangs were almost wet with Shea's blood; however, something stood in its way.

It was a metal cross, 40 by 60 centimeters in length, stood between them. It acted as a round shield and stopped the demon's jaw from closing down on Shea.

「Fuee!? Wh, what is this?」

Shea expressed her astonishment. The demon desperately jumped at the foreign object which had just appeared, but the cross emitted a crimson light, undaunted in the least.

It emitted a thin light. And, with an explosive sound, the demon's lower jaw was blown off.

「Guuraaa!!!」

As it screamed, the cross silently moved above and crushed the monster's head with a bullet.

Zudon, hearing this sound which could be felt in the depths of one's belly, Shea's grip on the Drücken eased up. Shea looked around to see two other crosses floating in the air around her.

『Shea, don't relax your guard. Amongst them, there are obviously those with different movements. Even if they are ruled by those who have been brainwashed, the subordinates are still very much on their own. I've left three cross bits to you. Twenty-seven are to the right. Five are with Yue for the front.』

Since Shea was slightly conscious that she had narrowly escaped her pinch, she received a message from Hajime via "Telepathy." Her mind returned to normal, and she braced herself as she focused on her choker (Shea would say "This definitely isn't a collar," answering back telepathically.

『Roger! Also, you saved me. Thank you!』

"Yeah. Take care."

「… Fu fu, Hajime-san has been so kind lately. I've gone one step further!」

After checking that their communication had been cut off, Shea brought her hands to her cheek and looked at the “cross bit” which was protecting her. She grasped Drücken and again began her attack.

「As usual, she’s being reckless…」

While muttering to himself, Hajime killed the demons around him. Four crosses floated around him.

— Gravity Controlled All Range Attack Weapon, “Cross Bit.” These were the floating crosses Hajime had created.. They

specialized in mobile attacks and flew on the same principle as the unmanned reconnaissance planes. The bullets were loaded inside and were operated with Induction Stones installed in a bracelet. Furthermore, he had used Creation Magic to coat them with an ore utilizing “Strength of Gold,” allowing them to act as a powerful shield.

Hajime used gun- kata with Donner & Schlag while manipulating the cross bits. His attack was like a storm; already, he had killed more than forty demon leaders. Many of the remaining demons dispersed in fear of his “Overpower.”

「Hm? That’s…」

At that time, Hajime saw a shadow running away in the corner of his vision. Though he thought he had mistaken a severed head for this shadow, he used “Far Sight” and confirmed what he saw. That very head was covered in a black robe.

The man in a black robe, Shimizu, had lost his temper like a child and began shouting at the demons who were running away. He began to recite an aria while holding up the artifact cane given to him at the Palace.

Of course, Hajime had no obligation to wait, so he fired Donner and shot the cane away. Shimizu fell over from the impact.

Though Hajime did not know what Shimizu did, Hajime saw Shimizu hide in the shadow of a black wolf . In the end, he had a better ability to control the demons nearby than otherwise.

Suddenly, he was surrounded

In the end, the wolves were not weakened by being brainwashed, and their cooperation … simply put, was nowhere near as strong as the demons in the lower layers, but they were hardly weak. Still, Hajime acted as if understanding how they would move, a result of the unique magic “Foresight.”

(Are those demons from the other side of the mountain? And…

regarding this, is this really only Shimizu’s doing?)

Doubts swirled about Hajime’s mind as he received attacks. While Hajime’s mind was not focused on defeating the demon leaders, twelve four-eyed wolves appeared.

Front, back, left, right, they attacked him in waves. Hajime evaded their attacks and shot them with Donner & Schlag, determining their position with “Foresight.” He was surprised, since they were able to evade him as well.

They probably had some form of communication akin to telepathy, so they could see the battlefield from a bird’s eye view.

Hajime blew away four wolves with cross bits from behind as he reloaded his weapons. The next set of wolves he defended against using their dead comrades as a shield and firing with a shotgun built into his artificial arm.

He stood inside a rain of blood with two cross bits before him, surrounded on all sides by wolves. He rushed out with “Ground Contraction” and shot one from behind while reloading his cross bits.

At the same, four-eyed wolves attacked from both sides, brought down by Hajime’s cross bits; he fired with Donner & Schlag after reloading again.

「Guraaaaa!」

Four wolves dashed forward, desperately trying to pierce through him.

Hajime avoided their attack by jumping to the side and firing, blowing one’s head apart.

The remaining took a defensive position and attacked at once, trying to crush him. Their timing was perfect.

However, the moment their jaws pierced him, they bit through air. Hajime had moved away, leaving an afterimage. He shot through one wolf’s abdomen with Schlag.

Every wolf that came at him, he blew away.

The black wolves had mistaken what they saw; it was due to a derivation of the skill “Presence Interception,” 「+Illusion Step.」 Not only could he read their presence, he could also leave remnants of his own presence in a certain position for a few seconds. Of

course, it was simple enough to see through this with careful observation, but in a fight where a single second could make a difference, it was not an easy task.

Naturally, for Hajime who used “Strength of Gold” to treat his cross bits, even demons of the wolves’ strength were no match. This last resort attack of Shimizu’s was taken care of in less than 2 minutes without leaving a single injury on him.

Hajime’s cross bits flew, shooting down the leaders in waves. Shea, too, had taken care of her side, and Yue had utilized the Thunder Dragon and prevented any demon from approaching the town.

After getting rid of the brainwashed demons, Hajime took a deep breath, and, utilizing “Magic Radiation,” let loose a roar.

「Kaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!」

His roar released magic throughout the battlefield. With “Overpower” in effect, every demon hit felt an instinctual fear.

When they noticed their leaders were gone, their bodies froze. They backed away and took flight to the north.

The wave of demons avoided Hajime. He used his sharp eyes and saw Shimizu fleeing on one of the black wolves; it was most likely his final one.

「Unfortunately, you missed your chance to leave. You may have had some hope if you used the entire army as cover.」

Hajime grasped Donner in hand and continuously pulled the trigger.

His bullets ran through the air with what seemed to be an odd time lag; feeling something dangerous from behind, the black robed man turned around. Using “Foresight,” Hajime had aimed accurately, firing through the thigh of the large wolf.

The impact blew Shimizu off as well. Since his stats were high, he quickly got up and ran up to the wolf and began kicking its head.

He was obviously feeling a sense of panic as he shouted at it to stand up. In order to force it to move, he began chanting an aria while placing his hand on the wolf’s head.

Seeing this, Hajime finished the wolf off. Shimizu fell back as a result but quickly began running north on his own feet.

Hajime took out Stiefe and accelerated quickly, catching up to Shimizu in an instant. Kiii, Shimizu heard an unfamiliar sound from behind and desperately ran seeing a motorcycle which could not possibly exist in this world.

「What is this! What’s going on! This is impossible! Aren’t I the true Hero Gupeee!?」

Hajime drove and struck the back of Shimizu's head with his artificial arm. Shimizu slipped and slid on the ground for several hundred meters before stopping.

「Now then, I'm curious to see what Sensei will do…」 Hajime pulled out a wire from his arm and tied Shimizu up. He

headed back to town, dragging Shimizu behind Stiefe, painting the earth red with blood… In all meanings, he was the general of a defeated army.

For Yukitoshi Shimizu, being summoned to another world was like a dream come true. Though he understood it was impossible, he read web novels and the like every day, dreaming of the possibilities. In his dreams, he saved any number of worlds, and he would reach happy endings and fall in love with the heroines.

Shimizu's room was buried in posters of beautiful girls. His shelves were lined with manga and light novels as well as eroge. Whatever could not fit on them was placed in an ever-growing tower.

Yes, Yukitoshi Shimizu was a true otaku; however, his classmates did not know. He thoroughly hid the fact. The reason was, given how his classmates acted toward Hajime, he did not want to be exposed.

Shimizu, in the class was not particularly verbose. He did not have close friends, and he was a mature individual who always read in

his seat. If he was talked to, he gave a minimal response.

Originally, he was not like this, but he was easily bullied in junior high.

He spent all his time in his room, so it was inevitable that he would turn out this way, buried in games.

His parents were worried about all the goods in his room, and his brothers were annoyed with him, showing it in their words and actions.

Shimizu eventually lost contact with much of his household and instead devoted himself to his delusions.

For him, he understood what was going on when they arrived in another world, and he was secretly saying 「It's here～～～!!」in his mind. Aiko protested against Ishtar who wanted to send them out to fight while Kouki determined he would bring victory to humanity and return home. Shimizu had imagined this situation many times and was flying high realizing the impossible came true.

Things were different from how he hoped, however. First of all, though Shimizu had cheat specs, his classmates were no different; furthermore, the "Hero" was not him but Kouki. Because of that, the women would flock to Kouki, and he would just be "one of the others."

Although his wish was fulfilled, it did not go as Shimizu had hoped, increasing his dissatisfaction.

Why aren't I the Hero? Why, when I have desired this for so long, is it Kouki that will be surrounded in women? Why is Kouki special? If I was a Hero, I would be better. Everyone would accept me… These thoughts gnawed away at Shimizu's egocentric mind.

Then it started. It was training in 【Orcus Great Labyrinth.】 This was his chance. He worried about no one. Finally, Shimizu

noticed when he realized his abilities.

Shimizu was not a special existence at all, and this was especially true when they all faced "death." When the trauma surged through all their minds, the "Hero" was fighting far ahead; his empty world collapsed.

And then he saw his classmate fall into the Abyss and "die." His mind broke. Everything was a convenient delusion he held, naturally, his mental durability was not that strong.

He had interpreted the entire situation to his own convenience, originally, as someone who kept out of the eyes of others, his mind was naturally weak.

Shimizu would return to his room when they got back to the Palace and stay there. However, the items which cheered him up and ate up his time were in Japan, not here. Naturally, Shimizu spent his time reading books on magic, especially "Dark Magic."

Dark Magic. It was a system of magic which acted on the enemy's thoughts and spirit. It was recognized as a magic which afflicts bad

statuses on the opponent in battle. Shimizu had a high aptitude for it, too. He could easily show his enemies an illusion, and, with enough practice, he would be able to manipulate their body.

And so, while reading books, Shimizu's dreary feelings were blown away as he came upon an idea.

- With Dark Magic, can't I learn to brainwash and thoroughly rule others?

Shimizu was excited, if he was correct, he could control everyone, they would like him. The dark emotions stagnating in his mind fueled his desire to train.

But things were not that simple. First of all, he could not control those with a strong personality for long periods of time, and if he did not keep the magic up for hours, he could not control them.

Naturally, that was if there was no sign of resistance, but who would sit still when magic was being cast on them? He would need to hide himself and continue to brainwash his target for long periods of time, and the risk was high if he was discovered. Shimizu could only abandon the idea.

Though Shimizu drooped his shoulders in regret, he recalled reading about Demons. Unlike Humans, Demons acted on instinct and their ego was weak, so it would be possible to brainwash them.

Shimizu went outside the capital every night to experiment and trained against small fry demons. He proved he could control them much more easily than a Human, especially since Shimizu's own stats were like a cheat and he had talent for Dark Magic. Before long, he was able to manipulate more than just one or two creatures.

Once he finished experimenting in the outskirts of the city, Shimizu thought to look for a strong demon; however, he was intimidated and did not want to go into the Labyrinth with Kouki. At that time, he heard about Aiko and her escort. If he went with them, he thought he might be able to encounter the kind of demon he was looking for.

As a result, he came to 【Ul】with Aiko and the other students. There were many demons in the mountains with their subordinates. When he next met with them, he would be able to control many of them, and everyone would look at him in respect.

Shimizu, a genius in Dark Magic, in a span of only 1 to 2 weeks, was able to efficiently control brutal demons at the second mountain range.

However, with the help of a certain existence, with Tio's help, who he found by chance, he would be able to control even the demons beyond the fourth mountain range. At that time, the demons he already controlled gathered more of their kin.

When Shimizu was finally immersed in his feeling of being special, he dispatched the large herd to the town.

The result…

He had fallen low and was made to kneel before Aiko.

The reason he was in such a poor state was because Hajime dragged him along behind Stiefe. Shimizu, now conscious again, could see Aiko cramping up.

By the way, they had moved to the suburbs with Aiko, the students, the knights, the town leaders, Will, and Hajime's group. Everyone else was taking care of the aftermath of battle.

If Shimizu had been taken to the city, there would be an uproar. It would be difficult to communicate with the commotion. He processed that after the fact.

Aiko looked at Shimizu. The fact that he had been taken straight from the battlefield was evidence that he was the mastermind. Her face was distorted in sadness.

「Aiko, it's dangerous.」

David and the others shook their heads, stopping Aiko from approaching. Eventually, they let her speak. Most likely, she planned to talk to him like a teacher would to a student.

「Shimizu-kun, Shimizu-kun! Please get up! Shimizu-kun!」
「Guu…」

Before long, Shimizu's consciousness fully returned and she called

out to him. He absent-mindedly ignored the others and sat up.

Though he started to stand up and take distance, the injury on the back of his head still remained, so he simply staggered. Caution, annoyance, they were mixed in his expression as his eyes moved about.

「Shimizu-kun, please calm down. I don't intend to hurt you … I, I just want you to talk to me. Why did you do this… Could you tell me?」

Shimizu matched Aiko's gaze and stopped moving. He looked down and, rather than talking… he spouted out abuse.

「Why? You're all nothing. Every one of you. I hate you all… Hero, Hero, you're all so damn noisy. I'm the best… yet no one noticed, they treated me as an extra… Really, how idiotic…

That's why I thought I'd show you my true worth…」「You… What the hell are you talking about! You could have

destroyed the town!」

「That's right! You're the idiotic one!」

「Ai-chan Sensei was just worried about you!」

Far from reflecting, Shimizu was dissatisfied with everyone. Tamai and Sonobe objected one after another. Perhaps pushed down by their energy, Shimizu remained silent.

Aiko continued speaking to Shimizu with warmth in her voice. If she just acted like the other students, they would get nowhere.

「That's right, there's a lot to be annoyed about … But Shimizu-kun, I don't understand, if you look down on everyone so much, why attack the town? So many people would pass away… you couldn't possibly show your "worth" like that.」

It was a justifiable question. Shimizu looked up beneath his bangs and smiled.

「Of course I could… to the Devils.」「Wha!?」

Hearing his words, everyone save Hajime gasped in astonishment. Shimizu was satisfied with their reaction and continued to speak.

「I went to the northern mountains alone to capture those demons. I met a devil there. Of course, I was cautious then…

but that person spoke to me with expectations. That person understood my true value and said I could join if I did something.」

「Join…? What was that something?」

Though Aiko was shaken, she had to point her anger at the devil who was taking action on her student.

Shimizu spoke his next words with a grin, shocking all of them.
「… Hatayama-sensei… I was supposed to kill you.」

「… Eh?」

Aiko let out an odd sound, not able to process what she just heard. The people around her were the same. Once they understood, they angrily stared at Shimizu.

Shimizu ducked momentarily from the strong sense of anger they had, but he quickly shook it off in desperation.

「What, did you think you'd be left alone by the Devils? In a certain sense, you're even more troublesome than the Heroes… "Goddess of Fertility"… If I killed you along with the entire town, I would be invited to join them as a "Hero." That was the contract.」

Shimizu's voice grew louder as he recalled that time.

「They recognized my ability, they understand. I even had super strong demons under my command, and I controlled enough to kill you. But what was that… ! Sixty thousand troops killed! Those weapons of yours aren't from this world! You, who the hell are you!」

Aiko froze and looked at Shimizu in blank surprise hearing him say "kill.." Shimizu glared at Hajime.

His eyes were full of irritation and hatred toward Hajime who stopped him as well as envy for his power. It was like a mass of

impure motives which drove his insanity.

Apparently, Shimizu did not realize he was his classmate, Nagumo Hajime. It was unavoidable, since no one was there to even mention it to him…

Shimizu continued staring at Hajime as if he would attack at any moment. Hajime thought he, too, could have been the same, and he looked off in the distance. Hajime's gaze which did not even look at Shimizu's existence fueled his rage further.

Yue, understanding Hajime's feelings, gently pat him on the back. In this time when Hajime was entrenched in a serious

atmosphere, Aiko recovered from the impact and gathered the courage to speak further. She clasped one of Shimizu's hands and calmly spoke.

「Shimizu-kun. Please, settle down.」「Wh, what is it! Let go!」

Shimizu tried to shake her off, surprised he was suddenly touched, but Aiko continued holding his hand. Shimizu, unable to meet her gaze, looked down, his expression hidden by his bangs.

「Shimizu-kun… I understand your feelings. The desire to be "unique." But you were mistaken in how you went about it. That desire is natural as a person. I'm sure you could become something "special" as well. But the method you thought of was a mistake… Don't go to the Devils. They're taking advantage of your desires. I can't let such a precious student go to people who would do that.」

Shimizu could not look at Aiko in the eye and gazed downward, seemingly regaining his presence of mind; his expression was hidden by his bangs. Aiko continued speaking.

「… Shimizu- kun, let's start over. If you want to work hard, I will do what I can to help you. You'll definitely be able to fight on equal grounds with everyone. Some day, we will find a way to return home, together, okay?」

Shimizu was silent, and his shoulders began to shake. The students and the knights thought he was crying from Aiko's words. In actuality, Sonobe Yuuka, famously sentimental, was moved to tears herself.

But reality was not so kind.

Shimizu suddenly grasped her hand and pulled her to him, grasping her neck. Aiko groaned out as a 10 centimeter long needle was pointed at her neck.

「Don't move! I'll do it!」

Shimizu shouted hysterically. His eyes, in a frenzy, stared at Hajime.

Aiko was unable to pull away from Shimizu who tightly grasped her throat. The people who rushed in to stop Shimizu ground to a halt. They understood he was serious. They could only call out to Aiko in

worry.

By the way, Hajime finally returned to his senses. Because he was not paying attention, he looked around and said 「Oh? How long has this been going on…」

「Listen, this needle has poison from a venomous demon in the mountains! She'll suffer and die in a few minutes. If you understand, then throw down your weapons and raise your hands.」

Everyone turned pale. Shimizu smiled and looked again at Hajime. 「Hey, you, and the other two! All of you, looking down on me,

don't think I won't do it! If you understand, then give me your gun! Got it? Everything you have! Give it all to me!」

Hajime looked at Shimizu and thought 「He's not acting like himself」 and had an odd expression. Shimizu, in this tense situation, thought he was being made fun of again and lost his temper.

Hajime calmly returned Shimizu's gaze.

「No can do… In the first place, the Devils won't let you join unless you kill Sensei, so you'll be doing that regardless, right? Then there's no point.」

「Shut up, shut up, shut up! Listen here! Give me everything you have, don't say anything more! Th, that's right, heh heh, hey, give me your slave, too. Make her bring everything to me!」 Shimizu shouted even more; being cornered, he lacked his typical judgment. Shea's entire body shook as she felt Shimizu's gaze

on her.

「You're noisy, I could shoot you three times before you did anything, but that won't do… Actually, Shea, stop hiding behind me. Well, I guess he does have a disgusting face.」

「But he's really yucky… It's physiological… Look, I have goose bumps, I can't help it.」

「Well, it's pretty clear what he wants, actually, he's more of a thief than a hero.」

Though they were speaking quietly, naturally, their voices were raised when they were talking about their disgust and repulsion, so everyone heard them normally. Shimizu's face turned red, blue, then white. He was the perfect example of a person's complexion changing with his anger.

Shimizu hollowly said 「I'm a Hero, I'm special, everyone else is stupid, they're bad, everything will go my way because I'm a Hero, I'm special.」 His muttering ended and he began to laugh.

「… Sh, Shimizu-kun… Please… it's fine… so please…」

Aiko painfully spoke to Shimizu who had a crazed expression. The moment he heard her voice, Shimizu stopped laughing and strangled Aiko more.

「… Shut it. You really are a good person, you damn hypocrite. You stay quiet, you're just a tool to help me escape.」

Shimizu muttered in a dark voice. He turned to Hajime again. He simply looked with all his dark emotions focused on Hajime. He then looked at the holster on Hajime's thigh. If he hesitated or said anything here, he would ignore his own life, no, he could very well harm Aiko.

Hajime sighed. He passed over the gun and wire so as not to stimulate Shimizu and slowly reached for Donner & Schlag. Aiko's body twitched; she was hardly acting as a shield.

Though it was possible to hit Shimizu before he even realized it given Hajime's draw and shooting speed, he could see Aiko's intent in her eyes.

However, the moment Hajime's hand dropped, the situation changed.

「!? No! Dodge!」

While shouting, Shea used her body strengthening as best she could and jumped toward Aiko with Ground Contraction.

Shimizu began thrusting the needle toward Aiko due to the unexpected situation, but Shea forcibly tore Aiko away from him while twisting her body around, the needle piercing the space where Aiko's head was just a moment earlier, straight into Shea's chest.

Hajime quickly reached for Donner which was shot away with a laser of water, most likely, it was the Water Magic, "Rupture."

Shea held Aiko closely, her shoulder slipping along the ground.
「Ugu,」Shea moaned in pain.

「Shea!」

While everyone stood frozen, Yue ran up to Shea while calling her name. She took precautions to defend Shea and Aiko who was in her arms.

Hajime, while mentally thinking and praising Yue for her prompt action, grasped Donner and traced the line of "Rupture" with "Far Sight." There, he saw a man with swept back hair and pointed ears who wore black clothes. He was climbing aboard a large bird.

Dopan! Dopan! Dopan! Dopan! Dopan! Dopan! Hajime fired his rail gun toward the shadow.

The man with swept back hair anticipated it and took evasive actions, forcing the bird demon to do a barrel roll.

Though it was a demon which exchanged power for mobility, it could not evade everything, and one of its feet was blown off; still, even if its speed was decreased, it could still run away.

Perhaps he was the devil Shimizu met. He had used the town to hide his presence.

Since he knew how to escape, he likely knew about Hajime's weapons. Hajime was bitter to know information about himself had gone over to the Devils. Even pursuit with his unmanned reconnaissance planes would also be difficult if the man entered the woods. Furthermore, he had other priorities.

「Hajime!」

Yue also guessed that the enemy had escaped as she called to Hajime with a voice full of impatience, unlike her typical self.

Hajime put Donner in its holster and ran up to Shea, ignoring Shimizu who fell nearby. Shea was lying with her head on Yue's lap, her face in pain. Aiko was in a worse state, held closely to the two.

「H, Hajime- san… Ukuu… I… I'm fine… H, hurry, Sensei… the needle… touched her…」

Shea had a hole in her chest about three centimeters in diameter. Though she was suppressing her bleeding with her body strengthening, it was clear from her expression and the sweat falling from her face that she was in terrible pain. Still, she said to make Aiko a priority with a smile.

Aiko's face was pale and her hands and feet were convulsing. Perhaps hearing Shea's words, she shook her neck, desperately appealing to him to help Shea first. She was already unable to speak. If what Shimizu said was the truth, she would die in a few minutes; no, she would not even last a single minute.

Hajime looked away from Aiko and nodded to Shea as he took out a tube from "Treasure Warehouse."

The surrounding people were impatient from his expression, especially the students and David.

「Aiko, Aiko!」

「No… Sensei! What can we do, what do we do, Nagumo! Sensei, Sensei is dying!」

They tried Recovery Magic to no effect… However, they did not want to get in Hajime's way. When he said「Shut up,」they retreated silently.

Hajime was surprised himself. He was holding his anger from Shea's injury more than he expected. He realized that he recognized her as an important companion from the bottom of his heart. For that reason, he was unbearably angry at the devil that contacted Shimizu and himself for forgetting the possibility that he might still be near.

As for Aiko, in their confusion, they could not think of anything to do for her. In actual fact, there was nothing they could do, but,

though not well-ground, they were convinced Hajime would be able to.

As a matter fact, the devil was planning on killing Aiko while Shimizu was in a rage; however, he was stumped by Hajime's non-standard actions and his chance was lost.

Afterward, when he searched for a chance, Shimizu and Aiko's talk began, and he thought Hajime would continue acting in a non-standard way, giving him yet another chance.

However, though he was quick, he made one miscalculation. Shea's unique magic had activated.

Yes, she "saw the future" and moved before Hajime; naturally, because she was behind him, he could not see her movements. Her actions "broke" the future he saw.

Thanks to this, Aiko avoided the needle hitting her head or neck which would lead to an instant death. Shea had prevented that by sacrificing her own body. He was not sure why, since the two were not particularly intimate. As for Hajime, he was not willing to put his companion's efforts to waste. He used one of the few "Holy Waters" he had remaining to heal Aiko without hesitation. There was no time, that he was certain of.

Hajime took Aiko who Yue was supporting and held the tube to her mouth. He poured a little of the contents in.

Aiko criticized him with her eyes for not putting Shea as his

priority, but Hajime ignored her. Right now, he wanted to give priority to Shea's desire.

Still, no matter how much he poured into Aiko's mouth, her body would not move. She could not swallow herself. Rather, the liquid was entering her trachea, causing her to cough.

「Tch, this is serious… can't be helped.」

Hajime judged it would be impossible for her to swallow the Holy Water and drank the rest and poured it directly into Aiko's

mouth.

「!?」

Aiko's eyes opened widely. The men and women in the surroundings screamed in anger.

However, Hajime ignored them all and forced his tongue into Aiko's mouth, forcibly pushing the Holy Water in. Hajime showed no signs of shame or guilt, he was only doing things seriously.

Before long, Aiko's throat moved and the Holy Water flowed into her body. Pain attacked her body, then the cold feeling was blown away as a fire ran through her core. Aiko felt a pleasure, as if she was soaking her body in a hot spring in the dead of winter.

As expected, the Holy Water's miraculous ability prevented her body from collapsing from the demon's blood.

Soon after, Hajime separated his mouth from Aiko, a light thread stretching between the two. Hajime observed Aiko in expectation; his purpose was to ensure she was no longer in a critical situation.

On the other hand, Aiko looked at Hajime with unfocused eyes.

「Sensei.」「…」

「Sensei?」「…」

「Hey, Sensei!」「Fue!?」

Though Hajime called out to check her condition, Aiko simply looked at him. When Hajime called out to her in annoyance, she let out a cute voice then straightened her thoughts by slapping her cheeks.

「How's your body? Any problems?」

「Eh? Ah, um, yeah, um, I, I'm fine. There's no sense of incompatibility. It felt good… ah, no, never mind, it didn't feel good, but that medicine was really effect…」

「I see. Good.」

Hajime answered frankly and quickly removed the arm supporting Aiko as he turned to Shea.

Seeing Hajime's attitude, Aiko quickly turned to Shea.

Hajime brought another tube of Holy Water out. He poured half the tube on Shea's injury directly and brought the other half to Shea's mouth. Shea quickly shook her head without trying to drink it.

「H, Hajime-san…」「Shea, why…」

「Me too… Feed it mouth to mouth… P… please…」「Y, you…」

She was in pain and her body was covered in sweat.

Even so, Shea let her desire be known. Hajime was amazed and felt some admiration. Certainly, he used a mouth-to-mouth method to get Aiko to drink in public, but there was no other way; he could not do that here where there was no need for it. He angrily thrust the tube in Shea's mouth, ignoring Yue's own appeals.

「Mugu!? … Gokugoku… Puhaa… Uu～ Hajime-san is mean… I'm jealous of Sensei-san…」

「Hajime… Meh!」

「Ee!? Sh, Shea-san, Th, that was different! It was a lifesaving action, there's a difference in meaning with your request! I, I'm his teacher!」

Shea glanced at Hajime while sulking and Yue seemed to be scolding him. Aiko, in the meanwhile, was making excuses. Hajime simply sighed in relief and amazement.

The surroundings became noisy again, forgetting about one particular sad existence; for Aiko, he was important, and she could not easily forget him, but there were so many things going on that he was even forgotten by her.

Hajime took the place of the knight nearest Shimizu. 「… Shimizu, still alive?」

All members said 「Ah」 and looked back with an expression which said they just remembered him. Only Aiko went 「Eh? Eh?」 in confusion; however, recalling the situation, her expression changed and she ran up to Shimizu in a hurry.

「Shimizu-kun! Ahh, this… How terrible.」

Shimizu had a hole in his chest, the same as Shea. He was bleeding heavily and surrounded in a pool of blood… He likely would not last more than a few minutes.

「I, I don't want to die… S, save me… This… this can't be…

Impossible…」

Aiko grasped his hand tightly. Shimizu could only utter to himself. He stared at Aiko, asking for help from anyone, but they all turned away. It was already too late, they did not want to help him. That much was clear. However, only Yuuka, Atsushi, all the students, even if they could not forgive Shimizu, they did not wish for him to die, so they glanced back at Hajime with bitter faces.

Similarly, Aiko, who did not want Shimizu's death, looked at Hajime and shouted.

「Nagumo-kun! That medicine! There's still time! Please!」 Hajime said 「So it came to this after all…」 as if he expected her

words. He looked at Aiko and Shimizu and asked a question. 「You want to help him, Sensei? Even though he tried to kill you?

Really, you're going beyond what it means to be a "teacher."」 How many people would desperately try to save someone who

tried to kill them, just because they were a "teacher?" Aiko was unusual in this sense.

She read the intent behind his question and answered with a firm expression.

「That may be so. No, I'm sure that's the case. But still, I wish to be that type of person. No matter what may happen, I wish to be an ally to my students. That's why, Nagumo-kun…」

Hajime, hearing an answer he expected, scratched his head and sighed reluctantly. He looked up at the sky for a moment and took a deep breath before speaking to Shimizu.

「Shimizu. Can you hear me? I have a way to save you.」

「!」

「But there is something I want to hear first.」「…」

He could be saved. Shimizu stared at Hajime. Hajime asked a brief question.

「… Are you an enemy?」

Shimizu did not hesitate and shook his head. He smiled weakly and pleaded for his life.

「N, no… I, I won't… No more… I won't do anything… I'll help you… I'll gather forces… I'll brainwash women for you… I swear… I swear to follow you… I'll do anything… Help…」

Hajime looked expressionlessly into Shimizu's eyes, as if confirming his true intentions. Shimizu tried to look away, but it was too late.

Hajime had seen a darkness in Shimizu's eyes. Hatred, anger, envy, desire, a mass of negative motions, it was an ocean where light did not reach.

Hajime was convinced. Aiko's words did not reach him. Shimizu would surely become his enemy.

He was determined.

He looked at Aiko. She saw his eyes, and at that moment, she understood what it was Hajime was going to do. She jumped up, trying to stop him.

「Stop!」

But Hajime was overwhelmingly faster.

Two explosions muffled her voice.

「!?」

The sound of gasping.

One shot in the head and one in the heart.

He shot accurately. Shimizu's body shook momentarily as he died. No words could be sounded. Hajime raised his smoking gun and

silently looked at the corpse. Everyone simply stared at him in blank surprise. Silence ruled the area; no one could move.

「… Why?」

Aiko asked him in blank surprise as she stared at Shimizu's body. Hajime looked from Shimizu to Aiko. At the same time, she looked at him. In her eyes was anger and sadness, then all emotion

disappeared.

「Because he was my enemy.」 Hajime's answer was brief.

「For that reason! Shimizu-kun…」

「Will he change? Sorry, but I'm not so good-natured to believe that. More than anything else, I don't think my eyes are clouded.」

Shimizu's eyes when Hajime asked his question were clearly gone.

Even at death's door, he was thinking of a way to kill Aiko. He had no desire to change…

That was what Hajime thought. When Hajime asked his question, he was intent on leaving Shimizu to Aiko if he was willing to change, but Shimizu's eyes, even at death's door, showed no sign of repentance.

Surely Aiko felt it, but as a "teacher," she could not give up.

「That didn't mean you had to kill him! We could keep him in the Palace, we could return to Japan together… There was so much we could have done!」

「… No matter what reasons I give you, you need to realize that I killed one of your precious students. Sensei, all you need to do now is decide how you will act with me.」

「… That can't…」

「It's "a lonely way of life." You said that to me before, Sensei. But in this world, life is terribly cruel and light, and I won't forgive anyone hostile to me… That won't change, nor do I want it to change. I don't have that luxury.」

「Nagumo-kun…」

「From now on, I will continue doing this. Whenever I think I need

to… no matter how many times, I will pull the trigger. If you think I'm wrong… then you need only try to stop me… But please remember, whether it be you or my classmates… If you oppose me, I will pull the trigger… 」

Aiko looked down and bit her lips.

"You heard my conditions, don't deny my decision." — It was Aiko who agreed to this. She could say nothing further.

Hajime turned around. Yue and Shea followed closely behind him. Will silently followed him, though he continued looking at Aiko.

The town leaders and the knights, though they wanted to detain Hajime to retrieve his artifacts, once "Overpower" took effect on them, they recalled the battle which ended only minutes ago and withdrew.

「 Nagumo… 」

Yuuka was stunned. But she did not intend to call him to a stop. She was confused, suffering from a storm of emotions assaulting her heart. Even if she did not understand it well, she could feel herself thrown about. Atsushi and the other students as well were no different. They looked at his back, wanting to say something, anything, but they could not.

「 Nagumo-kun! I… I… 」

Even if she could say no more, her pride as a "teacher" forced her to call out to Hajime. Hajime stopped and spoke over his shoulder.

「… Sensei, your ideal is already a fantasy. However, I'm glad you're still a teacher, no matter how much the world changes… If possible, I hope you can continue like that.」

Without stopping this time, he pulled out Brise and left.

Only the joyous cries in the town from having survived could be heard behind him.

On the way back from【The Northern Mountain Range,】Brise quickly traveled down the road, raising a storm of dust. Thousands of people had tread down this road over the years. Brise, with its suspension smoothly, advanced toward Fyuren while keeping vibrations to a minimum.

Shea had the sunroof open as wide as it could be in the front seat and stuck her ears out, letting the wind flow by them; she seemed dissatisfied and apparently liked Stiefe better than Brise. She placed her face on Hajime's shoulder lazily as the wind swept by.

Hajime drove naturally. Yue sat next to him as was standard. In the back seat, Will sat. Will, slightly anxious, leaned forward and spoke.

「Um～ Was that really okay? Speaking like that… especially to Aiko-dono…」

Hajime turned around and answered without paying heed. 「Hm～? It's fine. Anything more would just be troublesome…

Sensei can make her decision without me there.」「… That may be so, but…」

「You… are a really good person, honestly… you're worried about others too much, aren't you?」

Hajime smiled bitterly at Will who still seemed anxious. He was seriously saddened by the death of the adventurers; that much was natural, but he remained in that town which had no relation to him and allowed Tio, the source of his grudge, to live, and now he was worried about Hajime and Aiko. Though he was a noble of the Kingdom, he aimed to be an adventurer; it seemed it was in his nature to worry about others.

「… Good person.」「A good person～」

「Right, a good fellow.」

Will had a complicated expression hearing everyone praise his nature. As a man, "a good person" was a very slight evaluation from a woman.

「I, I'm fine… I just wanted to hear your reasons..」「… Reasons?」

Will scratched his cheek and continued talking; however, Hajime's eyebrow twitched as he reacted to Will's words.

「Yes. Why you left Aiko-dono with such a bad feeling, why you killed Shimizu… those reasons.」

「… I said it before. He's my enemy… 」

「Even so, that does not become a reason to "kill" him but a reason to "not help" him, right? At that time, he had already received a mortal wound, and he had only a few minutes left to live… there must be a reason you killed him on purpose. 」

「… You have an unexpectedly good eye. 」

It was a justifiable point, rather, it was a bull's eye. Toward his classmate who was crying to Aiko for help, the impact of shooting Shimizu with only a single question and answer was needlessly strong. The fact that Hajime did not have to kill the boy was well hidden because of it.

Will also noticed it; the "eye" he was born with as an aristocrat did not allow Will to be deceived. Hajime let out a sound in admiration.

Shea, who was enjoying the wind, came in and said 「I was curious about that, too. 」While Hajime was hesitating to answer, Yue answered.

「… Hajime, tsundere. 」「… 」

「「「Tsundere? 」」」

Hajime was cut through by Yue with her silent poker face. Everyone else simply parroted her words.

「… Pushing Aiko away? Or maybe you were anxious? 」「…

That's just how it worked out. 」

With how Hajime promptly answered Yue's question, she was right. Shea requested an explanation.

Because Hajime did not answer, Yue spoke instead. In short, he had done what he did so Aiko would not feel responsible for Shimizu's death.

Shimizu had said it; in order to join the Devils, he needed to murder Aiko, the "Goddess of Fertility." In short, their goal was to kill Aiko. The attack that pierced him was also originally aimed for her.

Naturally, Shimizu's death was not Aiko's responsibility. He sold his soul of his own free will. Even if that was not the case, it was the devil that gave Shimizu the mortal wound.

However, would Aiko accept that? The last attack was obviously aimed at her; she would only think herself to blame. When that thought came to her mind, would she endure? Hajime had misgivings regarding that.

Aiko, too, was uneasy and afraid from the extraordinary circumstances that brought them to this world, as much as any of the others; however, she forced her feelings down and worked as hard as she could.

She was a "teacher," and the existences known as "students"

occupied her mind first.

A student died because of her. When Hajime told her a classmate tried to kill him, she was strongly shaken, this fact could very well break her.

Though he originally did not think that would be the case, he began worrying. Aiko's words, Hajime felt, were far beyond the ideal of a "teacher." Because of that, he felt there were inconsistencies.

Even so, Aiko talked to him about what would be necessary in the future, what would be necessary to make Yue and Shea happier; even if the world changed, even if Hajime changed, he still felt indebted to have a "lecture" from his "teacher."

For that reason, Hajime killed Shimizu despite knowing he would die soon. To create as strong an image as possible, he emphasized that Shimizu was an "enemy." In doing this, he accomplished his duty of protecting Aiko from "breaking."

「Fu fu, you really are a tsundere, Hajime-san.」「So that's how it was…」

「I see～ Master is unexpectedly kind.」

Yue finished explaining everything in place of Hajime and looked at him with lukewarm eyes. Hajime turned away.

「… But I think Aiko noticed it.」「… 」

Hajime silently glanced at Yue who kindly looked at him in turn.

「… Aiko is your teacher. She is someone whose words you remember. She could not have not noticed… 」

「… Yue. 」

「… It's fine. Aiko is strong. I'm sure the result you hope to avoid won't come to pass. 」 「… 」

Yue held a certain amount of trust in Aiko due to how highly Hajime himself thought of her.

With her eyes full of tender affection, she looked up at Hajime as he returned her gaze. Yue's words cleared his heart of worries.

「Haa～ Those two are in their own world again… I hope there comes a time when I can do that, too… 」

「Th, this is… how should I say it, incredibly sweet… 」 「Muu～ though I like abuse… This is frustrating… 」

Will looked uncomfortably at Hajime and Yue's personal space while Shea's cheeks were swelling as she bit her lip and pouted.

Yue, noticing this, looked at Shea and then glanced at Hajime to silently appeal to him. She was saying to give Shea a reward, since, with the use of her unique magic, she was able to act quickly and

save Aiko. In short, it was because of her that Hajime's teacher lived.

Since he fully understood Yue would accept no other response, he looked at Shea and spoke.

「… Shea. Um, how should I say this, you saved me this time. Though it's a bit late… thanks.」

「…… Who are you?」

As a result of enduring his embarrassment, he had an expression which could only cause Shea to respond in confusion. Though Hajime had a vein floating on his forehead, he endured and thought it a natural consequence of his deeds.

「… Well, no matter what attitude I take… this time, you really did save me in a pinch, so I guess I'm trying to express my gratitude?」

Hajime firmly looked at Shea and said 「Thanks.」

Hearing Hajime's honest emotions, Shea moved about restlessly, as if his words sent an electric shock through her body. She blushed and looked around violently while her rabbit ears were going piko piko.

「U, um, how should I say this, I didn't do anything special, but, but if you say a reward, really! This is really embarrassing… E he he.」

Hajime bitterly smiled as he watch Shea wiggle around shamefully.

「Shea, I've been a bit anxious… that time, why didn't you hesitate to jump in line? It's not like you were that close to her, so why risk your life…」

「That's… but she was someone you were worried about.」「… That's it?」

「? Yes, that's it…?」「… I see.」

Shea was bewildered and Hajime had an indescribable expression.

Certainly, Aiko was Hajime's teacher. She was different from his classmates and someone who wholeheartedly hoped he would not die

But he had no memory of clearly showing his emotions by speech or conduct. Still, it seemed both Yue and Shea were able to understand him.

He did not need Yue to tell him, Hajime spoke to Shea via telepathy.

「Shea. Is there anything you want?」「Eh? Something I want…?」

「Yeah. As thanks… well, that's the reason, of course, I won't set a limit on it.」

Shea was perplexed. She thought it natural to do something like this for her companions, so she thought his reaction was a bit exaggerated. 「Uu, uu～」she groaned. Yue looked at her gently and nodded to Shea who was unsure of herself. After a little time, Shea smiled and looked back at Hajime.

「Then I want my first—」「I refuse」

He quickly attacked and cut off Shea's desires. Shea stared at him. 「… Why? Rather, my dere period has come!! So that's it? Right?

Let me join the atmosphere!」「I did say "no limit."」

「That's enough. You always excluded me nonchalantly and went into your own world with Yue-san! I always felt lonely when you two showed your love! Uu, when we were in Fyuren, you sent me away so you could be alone, right? Gusu, And yet I… I spent my time alone… I pretended not to see what was going on with you and Yue-san… Damn it…」

「No, there's no need to cry… I fell in love with Yue, as for you, well, I can't say it's at that level, but you're definitely an important companion… It's not like I…」

「… Gusu… Hajime-san, you're worthless.」「… Hey.」

「Weak! You have no clue what a maiden is thinking! You have no tact! Closet perv!」

My time has come! Shea's joyful expression was clearly saying that. Shea always looked dissatisfied with Hajime and cried when he abused her, but now, her position was reversed.

「Pufu… The man who annihilated tens of thousands of demons…

worthless… Pufu.」

「Master, you are unexpectedly naive. To think you would be like this… The man who deprived me of my first time should always be one step ahead…」

Hajime heard those whispers and seriously thought about throwing them out of the car, but since Yue was gazing at him harshly, he could do nothing.

He swore in his mind to get revenge on Will. As for the other voice… he just ignored it.

「Shea. There's another hurdle. If she doesn't accept it…」「… Hajime, no good?」

Yue covered Shea before he realized it. Shea clung to Yue and cried out. Obviously Yue would allow Hajime to accept Shea. Recently, she was especially generous with Shea. Though Hajime thought it was because they deepened their friendship, she was more like an older sister who would trouble herself to help her younger sister. It

was quite serious.

The woman he held dear was asking him to include another woman. Hajime was anxious about this situation which made no sense to him. Still, there was something Hajime could not yield.

「… I, I seriously love Yue. I don't dislike you. Shea, I wish to value you as a companion… but I do not want to treat you the same as Yue.」

「Umu,」 Shia groaned hearing Hajime speak so earnestly about Yue. Shea held her hand to her chest, her rabbit ears turned toward him.

「I have the desire to monopolize her. No matter who, no matter what, I want no other man to be by her side. You can think me narrow-minded, you can think me selfish….and I think Yue is the same. Even then, will you accept that?」

「… Hajime.」

While Shea clung to his arm, Yue looked straight into Hajime's eyes with flushed cheeks. Hajime placed his hand on her cheek and quietly stroked it. Once again, a sweet pink-colored atmosphere drifted between them.

The two gradually approached and…

「… They forgot… about me… even though we were talking about my reward…」

Shea cried out as she watched the two from the side. At last, the two noticed the situation and quickly took distance. Yue timidly played with her hair as she settled herself down.

Hajime's true thoughts hit her like a surprise attack. Her expressionless face collapsed and she could not help but smile. Though she thought she was important to him, to hear those words from his mouth made Yue extremely glad. Her mind trembled and she instinctively forgot about everything but Hajime.

「… I see, I understand your relation … Shea, this is serious. 」
「Muu… His relationship with Yue is deep… Though I want to

interrupt them… well, as long as he abuses me… 」

Will seemed as if he would vomit sugar seeing how the three interacted. As for the abnormal existence behind them, she was panting.

「… Hajime, I'm sorry. But Shea is important… I want you to repay her. Take her around the town for a day… okay? 」

「Yue-san～ 」

Yue asked Hajime to do something for Shea. As for Shea, she depended on Yue and pressed her face against Yue as Yue patted her head. Hajime smiled bitterly as he looked at the two.

「I don't mind doing that much. Rather, Yue, why are you asking for Shea? If Shea asked, I would do that. 」

「Hajime-san… No, it doesn't matter what happens, it's fine as long as you can do this for me!」

「… You really are…」

「Well, for now, it looks like you've earned your date. When we get to Fyuren, you should take her to the Sightseeing Ward.」

「Yeah, I got it.」

Hajime consented to this plan of Yue's. Hajime had a complex expression knowing Shea was happy despite having this date applied for by someone else, but he simply thought 「I guess as long as Shea's happy.」

Still, because Shea was important to him, he was not reluctant, even when Yue asked; it was his true intent to repay her for her actions. Yue looked at him gently from the side as she stroked Shea's head.

「How should I say this, this away feeling. It's like an outsider who is in the middle of a pleasant family gathering.」

「U, y, yes. This air that does not allow for others… It is lonely…

Rather, when can I join in? When can I join?」

While watching the scene in the front seats which would make anyone uncomfortable, Tio had managed to place her head into the car through the window and was joining in on the conversations.

Before the fight, though she asked Hajime if she could join him in his travels, her existence was forgotten. She ran in a panic and

jumped on Brise when he left and was excited by his cruel treatment. Haa, haa, she was apparently excited by such severe treatment.

Of course, she was easily shaken away with the speed of the vehicle, but she took full advantage of her magic and obstinately stuck to them. Furthermore, since she was getting more excited with every passing moment, she felt bliss. For a pervert like her, their actions only pleased her more.

Though Tio was excited by this ignoring game where no one reacted, feeling emptiness from Hajime's words, she began to speak directly.

Still, no one responded to her. Tio eventually tried to crawl out of the carriage and enter through the window of the car, her black hair hanging down. It was reminiscent of a certain SadOko-san from a movie.

Certainly, with this, Will could not ignore her and went 「Uwa!」 and retreated to the other side of the car. His reaction caused Hajime to look in the back seat.

「Mu? Muu～ T, tight. My chest is in the way… Sorry, Will, but can you pull me in?」

Tio's large chest had hooked onto the window. Will slowly extended a hand. Seeing this, Hajime fired Schlag which he

silently drew from the holster over his left shoulder. 「Nuo?」

The bullet flew out and hit Tio directly. She could be heard writhing about in the carriage.

「Wh, what are you doing, so suddenly… But this is exciting, too?」

She complained while rubbing her blushing cheeks… Tio once again made a perverted remark. She attempted to get into the car once again, this time starting with her feet.

This time, however, her hips were caught on the window frame and she struggled to get in once more, her charming hips moving about.

Hajime shot Schlag repeatedly. Though he tried to blow Tio out of the car, she was stuck tight.

Every time a bullet hit her behind, she cried out 「Ahh!」or 「So rough!」or 「Master～」With such R- 18 cries being raised, Hajime reluctantly stopped shooting. After all, it was best he ignore the pervert.

Yue, who yearned for the Dragon Clan, already had her image of them shattered. She covered her eyes with her hand.

Tio, noticing the gunfire had stopped, managed to twist her hips

and her chest through. 「Fuu~」she sighed as she finally managed to invade the car.

「Haa, haa, really… You can't be helped, Master. But relax, I will accept all your love, so… can you do more? Will you be rougher?」

「Shut up, pervert. Don't approach, don't get near me. Actually, open the door and jump out right now.」

「!? Haa, haa… I will have to refuse, Master, even if you ask. I decided to follow you. I can accomplish my goals as a Dragon Clansman, and you need to take responsibility, I have no reason to leave. Even if you say this, I will not let go.」

Hajime returned a cold gaze to Tio who entered the car and fired off perverted comments in rapid succession. Hearing Tio's words, though, his face grew sour.

「Don't screw with me. What responsibility? We were just trying to kill each other. It's not like I did it, either. Anyway, you should leave all that talk about the role of the Dragon Clan to the Hero. He's the center of this entire summoning, go to him.」

「No, definitely not. I do not know what kind of person this Hero fellow is, but he would not punish me or berate me as mercilessly as Master does. Anyway, I already decided you would be my Master! Those feelings will not change!」

Tio emphasized her words with wide eyes as she clasped her fist. She was happy to receive Hajime's unrelenting words; after all, she was a bona fide pervert.

「I will chase you if you run away. I will spread rumors throughout the town saying I have a body that cannot possibly live without you, I will mention the things you have done to me, and I will describe every detail about you. How about that?」

「… You~」

With a vein appearing on his head, Hajime narrowed his eyes toward the seriously annoying person in back. Though he would rather kill her than think about all the trouble she would give him, since she was not his enemy, Yue would stop him. He thought he would hit her until she forgot everything, but given her personality, she would enjoy that, and her memory might not disappear.

As a result, the only thing he could do was glare at her. Still, Tio began shaking with his cold gaze. She was no good.

「No need to be so angry, Master. I will be useful. Though you are not normal, you should understand from our fight, right? I do not know what you're aiming for, but I will do everything I can. Master, please.」

「It's physiologically impossible.」 「!!!? Haa, haa… Nn! Nn!」

Hajime's words rejected her completely; Tio embraced her body closely while wiggling about. This time, it was not just Hajime but everyone in the car that looked at her unpleasantly.

Hajime sighed deeply after a while with a tired expression. 「… So it's useless, no matter what I say? Honestly, I don't have

the energy to argue with you anymore… 」

「Oh? Ohh~ I see, I see! Yes, from here on out, Master, Yue, Shea, please look on me kindly. Fu fu fu, happy travels… 」

「… Muu. 」

「L, look after me kindly as well… 」

Tio looked happily at Hajime as he sighed. Yue groaned in dissatisfaction while Shea returned a greeting in confusion.

Tio, a strange dragon girl, became their new companion as they traveled to the 【Neutral Commerce City Fyuren.】

A new meeting would await them there; naturally, they did not know. And after their journey to 【Fyuren,】 they would have a miraculous reunion.

Since Hajime and the others left the town of Ul, 3 nights had passed.

Though the difficult questions of corpse disposal and reworking the earth, as well as how to handle the still abundant demons,

remained, it was a miracle they even got this far.

The residents who took shelter in the surrounding towns were able to return, and families were reunited. The town of Ul was wrapped in a happy, festival-like atmosphere

The wall Hajime created was left surrounding the town, and the people used it to fully detail the battle, explaining with large gestures how much the fight surpassed common sense.

They spoke of it as legend. Those who took shelter, the children especially, had twinkles in their eyes. Shrewd merchants had already made use of the wall Hajime created to make a quick dollar by selling new, special products.

Since the townspeople did not know the relationship between

Hajime and Aiko, they believe he was dispatched by the “Goddess of Fertility” and named the wall he created “Shield of the Goddess” and revered it.

Furthermore, the white-haired boy with an eye patch was called “Sword of the Goddess” and “Knight of the Goddess,” and they respected him in kind as well. The true gnight escorts, such as David, could only say 「I really don’t like him after all!」 when hearing that.

Though there was some miscalculation on Hajime’s part regarding the two nicknames, everything went according to his speculation.

Aiko’s fame and popularity climbed. When she walked through the town, everyone gazed at her, and when she went inside, she received thanks and people began worshiping her. In this town, Aiko saved the people in a more clear, visible way, and they believed her to truly be a “goddess.” Rumors began spreading. It could be said, at least in this town, that Aiko’s words held more weight than the bishop of the Saint Church.

As for Aiko… While helping the town leaders and reconstructing the town, those close to her understood her mind was not there.

That is to say, what Hajime told her before the battle had a strong impact on her heart, and he killed Shimizu before her eyes. That sight remained in her thoughts and gnawed at her mind. After finishing work for the day, during dinner time, though she took dinner with her students and the knights at “Water Fairy

Hotel,” Aiko only carried the food to her mouth in a mechanical manner; she was not in the conversation.

「Ai-chan Sensei… really, you’re magic is amazing. The earth is being purified so quickly… In another week, everything should return to normal!」

「… That's right… that's good.」

Yuuka, noticing Aiko's state of mind, spoke brightly. She understood the reason Aiko was like this and wanted to encourage her; however, Yuuka's bright words were only returned with a lack-luster response.

Yuuka, seeing her benefactor shoot a classmate, was heavily shaken, and she was overworking herself to encourage Aiko. She, too, had the same anxieties as Aiko, so she was not very effective. Of course, Atsushi and the remaining students were no different.

「Aiko… Did the mayor and bishop say something today? If something is bothering you, please tell it to me. From the beginning, I was your knight. Even if the bishop tells me not to, I alone will be your ally, no matter what.」

「… That's right… that's good.」

David, not able to speak well, tried to encourage Aiko as well. Though he said words which acted against the bishop, dangerous

for his position as a temple knight, David was simply a man in love who fell.

He emphasized "I" and looked for opposition… though it seemed the knights surrounding David also stood with him.

Still, David's casual appeal was thrown aside with her words. It was doubtful she even heard him. 「Zamaa～」David's shoulders drooped and he had such an expression. The same could be said for many of the surrounding knights.

Possibly not noticing the students or the the knights, Aiko continued to eat indifferently.

(… If I spoke to Shimizu-kun more… if I noticed his desires earlier…

this might not have happened… And towards him, another student, I didn't ask a thing… At that time, if he didn't have a hostage… I… He died… He killed Shimizu-kun…)

The gunshot had replayed countless times in Aiko's mind. She gripped her hand strongly each time.

(Why… though they were classmates… because he was an enemy…? Is it that simple…? That's strange… People aren't demons… Without hesitation… is he a person who can kill humans so easily…? The other children, too… Will they become dangerous if I leave them…? If he was not here, would Shimizu-kun have died…? Will the other children be safe with him gone…? If he's not…!? What am I…! No, I can't think like this any more!)

Today, Aiko continuously regretted her actions and reproached herself again and again… If she did not think this through properly, she would begin to hate and fear Hajime, so she quickly cut off her thoughts and returned to her original ideas.

She wanted to think, she did not want to think, Aiko arranged the information in her mind as if it were a library full of bookshelves which had collapsed.

Then a calm, warm voice reached Aiko.

「Aiko-sama. Did you enjoy today's dish?」

「Fue?」

It was Voss Serio, the owner of "Water Fairy Hotel." His voice was not large or small; however, not a single person in the hotel could mistake it. His voice settled deep into the human mind and reached its target without fail. His words were also delivered to Aiko who was caught in a whirlpool of thoughts, bringing her back to reality.

After letting out an odd noise, Aiko turned her gaze to Voss and smiled with a blush.

「U, Um, what should I say? I'm sorry, but I'm a bit out of it.」
「No, no, no need to worry. You did not seem to dislike it from what I saw of your expressions. However, if you wish for

something else…」

「N, no! This dish is delicious. I was just lost in thought…」 While saying the food was delicious, Aiko could not recall its

flavor. When she looked around her, the students and knights were looking at her anxiously.

Noticing they were waiting for her to speak, she calmed herself down and began eating again; she panicked for a moment and began to choke for a bit.

Aiko coughed with tears in her eyes. The students and knights seemed overreact a bit while Voss casually brought her water and napkins.

「S, sorry. For troubling you…」「It was hardly a problem.」

Aiko was relieved with the sense of security brought on by Voss who was unperturbed, even after seeing Aiko make a mistake. Voss narrowed his eyes and spoke to Aiko in a calm, quiet voice.

「Hmm… Aiko- sama. Is it fine for me to be a bit presumptuous?」
「Eh? Um, yes. What is it?」

「What is it you wish to believe, Aiko-sama?」「Eh?」

Aiko had a “?” over her tilted head. Voss smiled wryly and continued to speak.

「It seems your mind is in serious confusion. There are many things you are thinking about, many things you do not understand. What is best? What do you want to do? You do not understand. If those are the only thoughts you have, you will only increase your haste; it is a vicious cycle which brings about more confusion. Am I wrong?」

「Wh, why?」

He had perfectly guessed what Aiko was thinking. Voss smiled and simply said, 「I see many guests.」

「At that time, it is best to “believe what you want to believe.” Well, if a person only believes in such a manner, they will overlook the truth, so I must give you that warning. Still, I think it is appropriate advice. With that said, “believe in those you wish to believe in” is also something you should do.」

「… Believe what I want to believe.」 Aiko thought about Voss’s words.

Aiko’s mind was filled with regret and guilt, and she began to doubt Hajime. Though he was a student and was certainly important to Aiko, he murdered Shimizu who was also her important student; at that time, she understood there were things which could take the lives of her students, and Hajime had just been recognized as that very threat.

Still, he was also a student. He could very well have deserted Shimizu who tried to murder them. But that thought only created more confusion. Even with such a difficult character, she could not help but think about this, because she was a “teacher.”

Voss did not know what thoughts ran through Aiko’s head; she did not know what to do or think, she did not know what to believe in. Her belief in he who committed the gravest sin collapsed, leaving her no room to move, but now she thought it might be fine to think

of it in a different light.

Aiko stopped eating and began to think.

(Believe who I want to believe in. What is it… I want to believe in? Above all else, I wish to return home with all the students, but that is impossible now. Now, I can only believe that we will return without losing anyone else… And him, to think he would so easily kill a classmate. I don't want to believe that…

even if he said he would kill anything that hindered his path, to think him someone who would not hesitate to murder… to threaten the students… I don't want to believe this. But, he really… didn't hesitate to kill Shimizu. In that case… No, I should believe what I want to believe.)

Again, Aiko closed her eyes and held back her dark emotions. The surrounding people anxiously watched Aiko as she moved slightly.

(He said it. "because he is my enemy." Also, "I have no room to spare." Because he had misgivings about Shimizu-kun, because he thought we may have been attacked again, he shot. He was thinking of us. Actually, if he was such a cruel person, Yue-san and Shea -san wouldn't put so much faith in him. He wanted to get rid of any further anxieties he would have… so he used his words in the most effective way he could. In a word, he felt it would be impossible… if Shimizu-kun could be reformed, he would surely have… I am powerless… Shimizu- kun… he still killed him like that… even though Shimizu-kun was already so weak…)

Hajime had a clear reason for shooting Shimizu. He was not broken, he did not simply think nothing of murder; he was not an enemy

who would stop the other students. Aiko wanted to believe her words would reach her “student.”

With that thought, she recalled the shock of a student killing another student.

(That’s right. I forgot. To begin with, Shimizu-kun was dying. He asked if Shimizu-kun wanted help, that’s how this all started. Shimizu-kun would have died, even if he did nothing. There was a purpose in shooting him. Why did he do it? To make sure he died? No, that’s not necessarily the case… I didn’t have time to ask him, either… could it be, he shot Shimizu-kun because of me?)

Aiko’s eyes opened widely; she was amazed she only noticed this now.

(… That’s right, Shimizu-kun received a wound that was supposed to be meant for me. If nothing happened, he would have died, and it would have been my fault. But he convinced us all, Shimizu-kun, the others, myself, he convinced us that he was at fault! I’m sure of it!)

If she was the reason a student was killed, she would stop thinking.

The existence of a student was Aiko’s support. If she were the cause of death for one of her precious students… Aiko would break. Her mental defense mechanisms would deprive her of thought. She would be enshrouded in darkness, and she would give herself to that darkness.

At that time, Hajime's words revived her mind.

— If possible, I hope you won't break.

At that time, with her mind shocked by what just happened, when she could not think, he threw those words at her.

(Could those words have been for me today… was he worried… ? He noticed I might "break" from Shimizu-kun's death. That's why… even if he didn't need to, he shot… to convince us that he was the reason… so that I wouldn't break from my guilt…

so I could remain a teacher…)

Aiko understood Hajime's sense of values. She knew he thought about more than just himself.

However, he still took actions to reject Aiko.

For this door to her heart which was shutting before her, Aiko stopped it just in time. She slowly opened it. Her narrow field of view was broadening again. Though her heart was still cold, she felt a small fire within.

(He, he defended me… Not just me, but so many others. These children by my side are alive now because of him. If he only protected us… no, I can't just come to conclusions like that…)

Aiko had a resolute expression.

Surely the thought of him killing Shimizu would not disappear, no matter what.

So long as there was a student who relied on her, she could not stop. Aiko swore that on her pride as a “teacher.” Even if the whole world changed, she would not.

Already, she held no suspicion, fear, or hatred toward Hajime. (What a clumsy person… he may have been hated by me, I may have been hostile, he knew this… did he receive my words properly… perhaps he was acknowledging them? What an

idiot I am, he helped us. He told me everything, he saved the town, and even during the fight, he brought Shimizu- kun to me as he promised. And I just sat here confused, chasing one thought after another… How immature. Still, he helped us…

and though he was certainly harsh… the good he did does not change… maybe he’s regaining some of what he lost? Could it be, those girls…?)

Aiko smiled bitterly in her mind as she thought of her debt to Hajime. Though she was ashamed there was so little she could do, she smiled a little to know he had returned as an oddly dependable person.

She was happy to see a part of his old heart still remain; he was not completely different.

However, when she thought of Yue and Shea who drew close to Hajime, she felt a pain in her chest. Aiko tilted her head and thought over it.

(That's right, I never gave my thanks to Shea-san. I owe her my life… I need to properly thank her when we next meet… He, too, saved our lives…)

The thoughts Aiko had of Hajime, which were sealed away in the corner of her mind, came back to the front, bringing a blush to her face.

(Th, that was a life saving measure, a life saving measure. It, it's not like I enjoyed it! Yes, there was nothing behind it!)

She suddenly began hitting the table again and again while coming up with excuses in her mind.

By the way, Aiko was an adult. Still, she had no love experience despite having a cute appearance and appropriate speech and conduct.

In Japan, there were only "gentlemen," and for Aiko who looked like a girl in her early teens, she could only label the men who actually went to dinner with her with a word that began with "lo," and, in the end, they would end up as no more than good friends.

In this world, since it was not unusual to marry so early, no one was

worried about her short stature or childish face. Though David was serious about her… she still had little love experience, and for someone like him from another world, he was practically out of her sights.

And so, his act of life saving had a large impact on her. She calmed down at once.

(… No, he has those girls, Yue-san and Shea-san, next to him…

What should I say about him having two people? I am a teacher! He is a student! To begin with, this is a problem! It doesn't matter what he thinks of me! I prohibit illicit sexual relationships! They're insincere! Love should be focused… Two people at the same time…! I won't allow such an immoral relationship! Yes, I won't forgive him!)

She hit the table even harder.

(… But Yue-san certainly is special to him. And her figure and style are similar to mine… Maybe he likes small women? L, like, maybe me? No, he's 8 years younger than me… but isn't Yue-san a Vampire who has lived for a long time? In other words, maybe he likes shorter, older women? Wh, what am I thinking? Get a grip on yourself, Hatayama Aiko! You are a teacher! He is a student! It was just a short kiss, to get flustered over that is a disqualification as a teacher!)

She stopped beating the table and brought her face to her hands. She returned to beating the table, then to deep thought. Finally, she gripped the table and said 「I am a teacher!」

The students and knights looked curiously at her eccentric behavior. Voss, who had seen many people like this, calmly smiled and said, 「So her energy is back.」

Aiko managed to settle her thoughts on Hajime. The fact that he was a student did not change; she would defend him from the Kingdom and Saint Church when needed; she decided to return.

Aiko did not notice it.

She had come to an unconscious conclusion.

Unlike the other students, she thought of Hajime as “him” rather than “that child.” And so, feelings began to bud. Aiko would only realize this further into the future.

Surely, Aiko would never imagine it would happen in the middle of a desperate fight 8000 meters in the sky.

Epilogue 1

In the shadow of a dark passage, something suddenly shook. It was a young woman with dark skin, pointed ears, and red hair. Following her was a creature which seemed to wisp about like smoke, wavering beside her. When looked at properly, it had a grotesque appearance, like a chimera, a mixture of numerous creatures.

The woman gazed deeper into the passage. Kouki and his fellow classmates had already advanced further in, though they did not see her. She had hidden herself; they had not noticed her for a long time now.

「Hmm～ So that's the Hero. He's just a little brat if you ask me, do I really have to do this? I have a rough idea of their strength, I need to take care of this matter so we can go ah ead to conquer the true Great Labyrinth.」

The woman touched the creature by her side. The wavering air engulfs her, weakening her appearance. Soon afterward, there are no signs of her presence, only silence.

Kouki and the rest of his party did not know that countless enemies were stealing upon them.

Epilogue 2

「Mama…」

Enclosed in cold stone and iron bars, crouching in the corner, is a young girl. She was 4 or 5 years old. She cried out weakly, pitifully for her mother many times… but no one answered.

At that time, footsteps reached her ear. Her body trembles. She holds her knees tightly, trying to become as small as possible. Before this girl who is so frightened, a man who clearly looks bad passes by and takes out a boy in a nearby cell.

The girl could tell from the sound and looked up. However, she was not frightened by this any longer. As far as she could tell, this was the fifth boy. He was taken out of here. The four that came before him never returned. This boy, too, would not return.

Even if she was young, she understood she would not be freed from this frightening place. Men had come by bringing children into the cells, talking about prices; the girl understood, there was no hope for her to be taken out of here.

「Mama…」

The child's voice had reached no one. Inside the darkness of this large city… her voice will not be heard.

The monster from the Abyss advances.

Alongside his beautiful Blood Sucking Princess, an innocent and shameless rabbit, and the newly added pervert of a dragon. This small meeting, like a miraculous reunion — It is a crossroad he is destined to meet.

Extra Chapter

The world was dyed red.

The Capital burned red, as bright as the sunset, as an abnormally sized magic formation floats in the sky.

「With this, with this…」

The young girl squeezes her voice out.

She had beautiful black hair and gold eyes; she looked to be 10 years old. She wore a beautiful kimono, her hair shaking in the scorching wind, as she looked at her hometown collapsing.

In her hands is a wooden column. It is clear how much strength she is using. Surprisingly enough, despite how sturdy the column is, it is screaming in the girl's h and, as if on the verge of being crushed.

The true colors of this girl with strength beyond her appearance is that of the Dragon Clan. Furthermore, she is someone from the royal family.

And now, the Kingdom — the girl's hometown, a beautiful land of trees and water, was being invaded and turned to ash. Shortly before, all races were living peacefully without discrimination, so how could this happen…

The girl could not think, she could only watch as her home burned down.

「Princess… it is dangerous here. Please take shelter…」

A woman waiting behind the girl pressed her to take shelter. However, the girl did not turn around; she simply shook her head.

「Princess…!!」

「Venri. I am the Princess of Clares. My father, brothers, they have all gone to war, so why should I run?That… is where I must go.」

While saying this, the girl pointed to the battlefield. The woman

— Venri — stood near the girl in a panic. 「You must not, Princess!」

「… I know. I would only be a nuisance. I regret the immaturity of my body.」

Blood dripped down the beautiful girl's lips. She was biting hard, holding her impulse to strike herself.

He country was set ablaze, her brethren have scattered, and in this time of crisis for her family, she was powerless, unable to act; it was unbearably hateful. She was filled with indignation and fury that her enemy still existed.

「Tio, get in the barrier!」

The girl — Tio — formed wings which slid out from beneath her black hair. The one to call her was her father, King Halga Clares.

Halga looked terrible. Though he wore kimono- like clothing made off demon hide which was far stronger than unskillfully made metal armor, there were burns here and there, and some areas were torn away. His body beneath it, too, was covered in large and small wounds. He had a large abdominal wound which continued to ooze blood.

Halga was a black dragon, one of those with the highest defense. He had a human appearance, a sign of his skill. Using "Partial Dragon Form," he had the form of a human with his dragon scales covering his body.

Using his body as a shield, he rushed toward the enemy camp, catching all malice and hostility, well suiting his nickname of "Mobile Fortress."

Tio knew her father's strength, so she was at a loss for words seeing him like this. Halga understood her thoughts seeing Tio's expression, and knelt down on one knee while smiling bitterly.

「Tio, it seems it ends here. We have done everything we can, but

we could not change the flow of the world. I apologize for not being able to leave you any of the land in your hometown. 」

「 Th, that, do not say that. Father! This is not the end for the Dragon Clan… it cannot be! Right!? 」

「 We are now the enemies of the world… Tio, do not turn your eyes away from reality. I taught you this before. 」

Tio held Halga while he spoke with a sorrowful voice and expression as if denying her father's words.

This was impossible. The Dragon Clan was the guardian of the world. All countries, all races received them. They stretched their hand out to everyone, bringing about peace. All countries, races, more or less respected the Dragon Clan; however, in the past few years, a rumor spread. Everything changed.

The Dragon Clan are demons. The Dragon Clan is trying to rule all races. It would not be strange if the Dragon Clan runs rampant. The Dragon Clan has turned their fangs on God. The Dragon Clan…

— Are God's enemies. What is that, Tio thought.

Dragon Form — It was a unique magic the Dragon Clan had. Certainly, it was something which people could fear. But that was why the Dragon Clan was more noble-minded than any other. It was done so that "fear" sublimated into "awe."

It was a foolish exaggeration. The Dragon Clan sympathized with others. They used their bodies as shields, coexisting with everyone.

As a result, for centuries the Dragon Clan had existed. Their Kingdom was called a paradise throughout the world, and they had even become the leader of a worldwide alliance, helping others defend the lands.

- Guardians of the World
- Bringers of Peace

- The True Royal Family

This was the praise given to the Dragon Clan by people across the world.

From those people who once praised them, now only curses and rage could be heard.

It was like a nightmare. The peoples' fear, hostility, and malice was turned against them…

Even if Tio watched as the world invaded her lands, she could not accept reality. I, I am still in bed, this is simply a dream. Please, let me wake up. This land is red, filled with anger, my brethren are no longer here… she thought this. She wanted to return from the

dream world, back to the world where all people drew close together.

「Tio! Get a hold of yourself! You, you are the youngest daughter of the Clares Family, the one who will lead the next generation!」

「… Father.」

Hearing her father strongly scold her, Tio returned from her fantasy world. She could not expose such disgraceful behavior forever; she wiped away her tears and looked strongly at Halga.

Love spilled endlessly from Halga's heart. He strongly held Tio. He would no longer feel this warmth, he regretted that.

「Fuguu,」 Tio cried out.

However, she closed her mouth before complaining. Over her father's shoulder, she saw Venri's expression. She noticed something was odd in her father's embrace. A natural doubt came to mind. Why did Father return from the battlefield…?

— He had come here for no other reason.

She recalled the words her father had just said. Despite her youth, Tio was praised for having an intelligence that would not lose to an adult's. She put the information together and felt goosebumps across her body. She understood her father's intent and looked at him as he embraced her.

「Father… this is a lie, right? Please tell me it is.」

「… Honestly. You really are a smart one. You can always read me, you have a beautiful face, your speech and behavior are good, every day you look more and more like your mother, Orna.」

Tio was convinced upon seeing her father's bitter smile. Now, at this time, her father was separating from her.

Tio could not say what she wanted, but she opened her mouth. The moment she mustered the strength to say anything, an enormous explosion spread from the center of the city. Tio instinctively balled up. When silence returned, Tio and Halga looked at each other.

「Wh, what was that?」「…」

Tio nearly screamed.

From ground zero, there was nothing. The land had been cleared away. She could see her countrymen being crucified one by one on wooden poles.

She saw it. Even at a distance, she noticed.

Her mother. Long, pale green hair, a beautiful woman with gold eyes which Tio inherited. She was always graceful, always smiled gently, and when riding the wind, she could fly faster than anyone; she was brave, resolute, she mowed down the enemy, and she was someone Tio respected greatly.

Her mother, Orna, was crucified in a terrible way. She was covered in wounds; it was obvious she fought to her last breath. And now

her mother was exposed.

A dark flame blazed in Tio's eyes. Her black magic light was typically vivid, but it was now deep, dense, filled with negative emotion, as if raging out of control. This young princess of the

Dragon Clan was changing into a true monster. 「Tio.」

「Fath, er.」

Engulfed in this torrent of magic, encompassing her rage and anger, it was a surprise she could even form words. She would move on any impulse. Halga knelt down on one knee again and strongly, strongly embraced her.

Tio's golden eyes which shined with rage and hatred looked at him. Why do you stop me? Why do you not expel those cruel, treasonous bastards? How can you remain so calm when mother has been killed… her thoughts were obvious.

Halga muttered in a small, nearly nonexistent voice.

「— I know not the meaning of my existence.」

Halga silently urged Tio to continue. Fuu, fuu, Tio's breathing had fallen into disorder from her anger; however, she returned to normal hearing the old words she had long since been taught.

「Is this body that of a beast, or that of a human. In all the world,

where does the answer of our significance lie.」

While embracing his daughter more strongly, Halga continued speaking.

「A desire without an answer. That is why, human or beast, that is answered by the soul.」

They were words of oath, the determination of the Dragon Clan.
「「The eyes of a Dragon see the truth and break through all

deception.」」

Tio and Halga's words overlapped. Tio drew strength in her body and gradually regained her sanity.

「「A Dragon's claws tear apart ramparts of iron and crush malice underfoot.」」

Halga separated himself and looked into the eyes of his beloved daughter. Their conversation was important. It was the last lesson. She had regained her heart, her mind as a member of the Dragon Clan.

「「A Dragon's fangs will feast on weakness and w ash away hatred and rage.」」

Blood dripped from Tio's lips once again. Just as she had just said, she had used her fangs to stab herself for losing her reason.

「「By virtue, we are but beasts. However, we are the Dragon Clan, and we will continue living wielding a sword of reason.」」

Quietly, Halga's finger touched Tio's lips, wiping the blood away from his precious daughter's face.

Tio's eyes were overflowing with sadness. However, she did not cry. Anger and hatred violated her mind, she wanted to scream, to kill the enemy, to completely give into it. But the "weakness" of this young mind would simply contradict her pride.

Strong, kind, noble.

In front of her father, before the remains of her mother who fought for her people, she could not forsake this pride.

Tio took a deep breath and nodded to her father who kindly looked at her. To the end, her father and mother boasted of this.

「We are the Dragon Clan!」

Tio shouted as loudly as she could with her small body. Halga, seeing his lovely daughter boast of her pride knew he no longer had to say anything; he simply held her closely.

「Tio, listen well.」「… Yes, Father.」

This was her last exchange of words with her father. While desperately holding back her tears, Tio responded with a resolute tone impossible to think of from a little girl.

「Our, no, the true enemy of the world is not the people who have invaded this country.」

「… It is the existence which distorts the world — the “God” the church worships.」

「Yes. We are existences which move the heavens and earth, we are thought of as creatures which cannot be killed… but that is not desirable for “God.” For that reason, the Dragon Clan will end here. I do not know why, but it is necessary.」

「Yes. If we fall to ruin, the people of the world will remain distorted. We must end this war.」

While bearing these heavy feelings, Tio showed her intelligence. Halga nodded strongly.

「The true enemy, “God,” is powerful, crafty. But “God” is not almighty. No matter the era, evil cannot continue prospering. So one day, one day there will be an existence who can kill “God,” that person will appear without fail. Tio.」

「Yes, Father.」

Halga spoke like a prophet. And to Tio, at the very end, he spoke his wishes as her father and orders as King of the Dragon Clan.

「Survive.」

「Father. But, we—」

Just now, her father had said if the Dragon Clan was not destroyed, the world would continue being embroiled in war, which confused Tio. Halga smiled fearlessly, a smile she had never seen before.

「Even if we know the enemy is powerful, we are not so simple as to give up easily. The Dragon Clan today will certainly fall to ruin… we will simply become a part of history… but there is already a place for us to hide. Go there. With Father, with your countrymen. Survive, until the time comes.」

「Wha, Grandfather!? Father, I thought Grandfather died… no, so that is how it is.」

When the flow of the world began to change, when the shadow of an enemy they could not see appeared, Halga made preparations with the previous king of Clares, his father, Adol. They would do anything to crush this plot. And so, Tio's grandfather, Adol, the previous king and the one known as the strongest Fire Dragon, was made to die such that not even his remains were left behind.

However, that was surely to trick the enemy, to secretly hide the

Dragon Clan in history. Tio guessed Halga and Adol's actions.

While happy that her grandfather was alive, Tio was assaulted by sadness at the same time.

「… Father, will you not go?」

「No. I am the king. The war will not end without my neck. And…」

「And?」

「I cannot leave Orna behind on this battlefield.」

Tio smiled lightly hearing her father say this like a joke. Halga pat Tio's hair while presenting his final words.

「Tio. You received my black scales, Orna's wind, father's flames; you are the pride of the Clares. The black flame has appeared in you. Do not forget the flames of Clares that you have had since birth, and live well.」

「Yes. Yes, Father.」

Halga finished speaking and left Tio to Venri while focusing on Orna. From the beginning, Venri seemed to have known what would happen. They watched to the end.

A massve, brave black dragon fired a flash of light which seemed to divide heaven and earth.

In this war, the Dragon Clan had not taken a single life; they had only disempowered t he enemy. To the end, the Dragon Clan believed in the people, in the pride of their country; they h ad used their bodies as shields.

The people moved together following God's wicked plans and killed them. However, even if their bodies had rotted, the people had not been harmed.

A roar and a breath, aimed to the heavens toward the gods who ridiculed the world, as if boasting that not even they could dirty the Dragon Clan. Like this, Halga challenged the enemy.

「Uu, muu～」

In a wooden, Japanese-like house, a woman groaned. It was a painful tone, an unpleasant one. The source was a beautiful face which was clearly sleepy.

She had black hair which was splendidly in disarray, large hills which seemed as if they would burst out of the kimono covering them, and a tight skirt which revealed the vicious hips which would drive a man's reason mad.

Furthermore, because she had a bad dream, she was sweating, her black hair sticking to the scruff of her neck down to her breasts.

「… Fuu. It has been quite a while since I saw that. It has been 500 years — and even now I still see that dream.」

The woman — Tio Clares, while sighing, stood up and mended her clothes. So as not to mope as much as possible, she flung open her windows. The clean air flowed in as she took a deep breath; her heavy heart seemed to have lightened.

Upon reflection, in these past 500 years in this second home, life did not seem to shine. The previous natural, rich lands of the Dragon Clan were now long gone, and it was a place all of the Dragon Clan, save for those born after that day, recall. Even so, this place filled with wyverns and wild animals was not bad for cultivaing crops.

But compared to the country before, naturally, it could not compare. This area was a splendidly large area with wooden houses in rows housing hundreds of people. Tio stood on the veranda and looked at the village w hen a voice called to her.

「Good morning, Princess. It seems you saw a bad dream… 」
「Mu, good morning. It was just a scene from the past. The last time I saw it was about 10 years ago? I was thinking about

Father and Mother a little. 」

Tio spoke to the woman — Venri — who guessed the contents of Tio's dream and gave her an impish wink.

Having guessed Tio's anxiety, Venri smiled wryly.

Before, her job was to stay by Tio's side and act as a guard, so worrying like this was natural to her; however, when it came to

ability as well as spirit, save for the head of the village, Adol, there was no one who stood above Tio, Including the young men. Rather, if the kingdom had not fallen to ruin, she would have been a queen who left her name in history… Venri could feel her emotions unsettle and decided to talk about something else.

「Have you had breakfast? You should eat now if you h ave not.」
「Hmm, right… mu? Where is Grandfather? I do not feel his

presence in the house…」

「Ahh, Cartous-sama called for him… he left earlier this morning and has not yet returned.」

「What? Car-Jii has called Grandfather? And so early…」

The one Tio called Car-Jii was a lifelong friend of her grandfather Adol, and his job was that of “Surveillant.” He had excellent magic perception. He traveled from far into the continent, returning once every few months. Many times he will return after confirming a disaster or accident.

(A standard report was done 1 month ago. Car-Jii is not here for that; did he find something on the continent?)

I do not like this… Tio thought, having a bad feeling of something boiling in her mind. She left for the Cartous house.

In the Cartous household, there were many senior dragon men beside Adol. Tio could not help but feel the weight in her chest

grow farther with this exaggerated atmosphere.

「Tio, you came.」

「Yes, Grandfather. I feel anxious. This atmosphere… like I thought, something happened on the continent?」

His granddaughter's intelligence was the same as always; Adol, his scarlet hair and stocky body, nodded with a wry smile, very much like a "grandfather."

「Apparently the church — or God has called for different existences. They have a large power. According to Cartous's "Sacred Eye," it is the "Hero."」

「Hero…」

Cartous's "Sacred Eye" was a skill that came with his occupation, allowing him to discern the nature of others. As a result, he obtained information on the job of "Hero" being summoned; Tio knit her eyes abruptly. It was not a job she had heard of. 「This situation cannot be overlooked. We must investigate this. Like before, I, Alois will—」

「I will go.」

Tio, for better or worse, stood out. Naturally, she had a beautiful face and a calm atmosphere, even amongst the Royal Family, and it had not diminished over the centuries. Her conduct, speech, behavior, the numerous men on the street were not suitable for her. Therefore, Tio was always on the side which received information on the continental survey.

Furthermore, the Dragon Clan was not to appear until “that person comes.” If the existence of the Dragon Clan came to light, it would be an emergency, and the God who failed to destroy them before would, in the truest sense, start a hunt for them. Tio heading to the continent was an impossible action.

Even when they lost their country, their homeland, Tio was always called “Princess” or “Tio-sama.” Tio understood her position. Therefore, Tio could never ignore their will, even if it ran contrary to her desires.

However, she elected herself. Not just Cartous and the other senior dragon men, Adol stared at her.

「… Tio, you say you wish to go? Will you tell us why?」

「Yes. Grandfather, this movement will surely move the world. Something inside tells me so. Even if you stop me, I will go. Only this time I will not yield.」

「…」

She was stubbornly insistent. This time, in a different sense, the people other than Adol stared at her. A strong will lay in her golden eyes, making one think of a burning flame. Adol quietly gazed at his granddaughter’s eyes… before long, strength left his shoulders as he nodded affectionately.

「Very well. Go on, Tio. See the world with your own eyes. However, do not catch the eyes of God. Only one person will go. In other words, you will be on your own. Understand?」

「I do… Grandfather, you have my gratitude.」

Though the seniors opposed, they were all persuaded by Adol, and Tio was sent out to investigate this incident.

The next morning, Tio could be seen at a nearby cape. Yesterday, when Tio nominated herself, she had been questioned

thoroughly, including Venri. Many people violently opposed this, trying to persuade her. Still, Tio's will did not waver, and she finished her travel preparations.

There was a large distance from their island to the continent. Even for the Dragon Clan which can fly across the skies, their magic would be nearly exhausted when they arrive at the continent. For Tio, who had a lot of magic, it did not change that the journey would be severe. As such, she left early the next morning.

At this cape where she would depart, excluding Tio, many dragon people came.

「P, Princess. Think over this. If something happens to your body, we…」

「Right! At least bring a guard!」

「If it is just that, then I can go! I will give my life to defend you!」
Venri tried to get Tio to give up. Alois, a veteran investigator,

offered to accompany her, then a young man ran up to her blushing. Excluding them, many dragon people detained her, trying to get her to stop.

Everyone sincerely thought of Tio as important. They all truly oved her.

「I welcome all your feelings. I apologize for causing you anxiety. However, I cannot leave th is alone.」

In contrast to her troubled expression, Tio gave her resolute words, causing them all to silence themselves. Tio watched her anxious countrymen. Her eyes were filled with affection as well as a power to challenge something.

「Venry. I understand how much you think of me. Since that day, even more than Grandfather, you stayed by my side. I see you as another mother. Please, allow your daughter to follow through with her will.」

「P, Princess…」

Venri collapsed and cried. She was far too happy with those words, unable to say any more.

「Alois. Please continue assisting Grandfather. Fu fu, you were the first candidate on the list to become my fiance. If I leave now, your life will be easier, will it not?」

「! I cannot allow a single wound to fall upon your scales. However, if you show me such trust, then I cannot decline as one of many men who thinks of you… what a tricky person.」

Seeing Tio smile at him full of trust, Alois looked at the sky. Though Tio had lived for 500 years, she had not allowed any man

to touch her body. It would not be odd to have a companion at this time, but… the condition Tio presented was too severe. As for the condition,

「I, I will one day defeat you, Princess. And… together with you…!」

The condition was to win against Tio, to be stronger than her. It truly was difficult. Not only was Tio a person with much influence in the tribe, she was the able to fight to a draw with the strongest dragon man, Adol. Since the tragedy happened, Tio became absorbed in her own training, and, before she noticed, she had become the strongest.

With Ristas at the helm, a young dragon man Tio saw as a younger brother, the many dragon men who liked her began expressing their own will.

She was strong, kind, noble. She had a beautiful face an d was intelligent. For the past centuries, many screams of 「I will do it !」 were heard as the competition to become Tio's companion became endless. However, far from crushing any of her scales, she was at a level where she did not even feel pain from their fights. Tio seemed

to have forgotten her sense of pain.

「Honestly, you people are simply embarrassing. I appreciate your desires… but I will not stop. Desire alone is not enough. Strength alone is not enough. Without either, nothing can ber done. So I will go. I will show you how much stronger I have become when I return. Fu fu… perhaps I will find someone who is my equal?」

While laughing, Tio presented her prediction to the men. The men all thought “I will catch up one day.” However, none committed this to word, as words had already become useless at this point.

「Lords. My brethren. Look at me.」

The dragon people all paid attention to Tio. Tio stood dignified, not flinching from the countless gazes, and spoke words of a king.

「Beyond this, I do not understand what will happen. I do not know what is going on now. However, I know something unprecedented is beginning. I will face this unnatural situation. But nothing will happen. Believe in me. Believe in the “Princess” whom you love —」

- I am the strongest of the Dragon Clan, the Black Dragon Tio Clares.

Receiving Tio’s words, the people spoke no further; they clearly felt Tio’s intent and slowly fell back, hanging th eir head together. If Tio, who they greatly respected, said this, they could do nothing but believe her. Tio looked at her countrymen accepting her and nodded preciously. She then changed into a black dragon and went out beyond the vast expanse of water.

Tio received the wind with her entire body and headed to the continent she had yet to see.

These past 500 years had been unchanging. On the day the tragedy occurred, she had heard the words of her father, Halga, and lived. But it was not enough to simply live. Like her father and mother did, she would risk her body and life for something. For the thing called “life,” the dragon Tio Clares existed.

She had a feeling. It boiled up within her. Seeing a dream of the past after such a long time, it was a sign to her.

Tio spoke with conviction as she flew straight ahead. 『I am sure everything will change… I can feel it.』

「I am feeling it～～～ Master!」

「Stop with the disgusting scream, you huge pervert.」

Tio hung in midair, feeling the metal fingers gripping her temple as she was subjected to an iron claw, screaming with an expression of joy. They were eating dinner in a restaurant in town, and the surrounding guests were watching the abnormal communication between the black and white girl and boy; Yue and Shea, to the side, had already moved to a different table and pretended to not know t he two.

While making creaking noises, Hajime moved his artificial limb to

its limit, a vein on his forehead, as she tapped his arm. Rather than saying it was at his limit, though, there was still room to spare. He put more power into his arm.

「Shtop— I will die! I, I really will die!」「Then give me what's in your hand.」

「Uu, is that not just a misunderstanding? Really? Believe me.」 She trembled; the thing which was in her hand, the thing she had used to wipe her mouth — Hajime's underwear — was held to

her bosom. Hajime looked at Tio with a stone cold gaze as he released his iron claw.

Tio sat down on the floor,「That, that was amazing… Haa, haa,」 she said as she smiled in a disgusting manner.

「So you finally handed it over. Doing stupid stuff during a meal, what's your excuse, you sorry excuse of a dragon?」

「S, sorry excuse… I, I am a descendant of the great Clares Family, numerous people have pursued me, haa, haa. And the one who made me like this, was it not you, Master? And may I go change my underwear?」

Jako, a dangerous sound rang as Hajime turned an artifact to Tio.「Three, two…」 with that count, Tio began panicking and let go of the underwear she held in her bosom.

「Chance, it was by chance. Master, your underwear dropped in the hotel room, and I thought I would return it! But…」

「Hmm? But what?」

In public, he was punishing her for using his underwear as a handkerchief, but her reason was fairly normal, so Hajime lowered his weapon—

「Depending on how I used it, I knew you would punish me—」 Po, she held her cheeks in both hands and writhed about while saying 「Do not make me say something so embarrassing.」

「Hm? What is it, Master. Such a kind expression—」

Hajime smiled gently while beckoning with his hands, making Tio kneel down on all fours. And while Tio was confused, he moved behind her and, to her large, enchanting hips,

「Like I thought, you're just a pervert.」 He sent multiple bullets into her.

「Ahiiiiii! My butt, my but! Thank you so much!」

Why words of thanks? As expected of the strongest black dragon.

Damage zero.

Afterward, from the shop owner said, 「All of you get out, this is a normal restaurant,」 as he drove them out. Shea and Yue looked at him in amazement while Hajime was truly depressed as he dragged Tio by her neck.

Haa, haa, Tio breathed roughly as she smiled as if it were normal. However, for a brief moment, her eyes changed as she looked up at Hajime… as if he was something dazzling.

「Grandfather, everyone. I do not know if I can return any longer…

Haa, haa.」

Did she mean to her “hometown” or perhaps to the princess they all “knew.”

Or perhaps it was in another sense…